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Cohabitation in Contemporary Britain:

A Theological and Pastoral Response.

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 2008.

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1 8 DEC 2008

Cohabitation in Contemporary Britain:

A Theological and Pastoral Response

Author – Peter V. C. Manning

ABSTRACT

In contemporary Britain, cohabitation has become normative as a lifestyle. It perpetuates a long history of informal marriage-like relationships, but does not necessarily seek to be part of marriage. National statistics are used to show how the steady increase in cohabitation since the 1960s is predicted to continue. Furthermore, cohabitation increasingly resembles marriage in that it has also become a family issue. As a lifestyle, cohabitation has remained outside the Christian marriage tradition and largely beyond the pastoral outreach of the church. The aims of this thesis are to explore how the church may address cohabitation alongside marriage within its pastoral and liturgical roles and encourage greater stability and faithfulness in all marriage-like relationships.

The development of the church's theology of marriage is explored to show how cohabitation and marriage may share similar ethics, intentions, and expectations. Contemporary attitudes to cohabitation and marriage are evaluated through two inter-denominational surveys of clergy and congregations in the Harrogate area. Amongst the clergy, few now reject outright the notion of couples cohabiting though Christian marriage remains the ideal. Congregations are more amenable and ready to accept the right for couples to cohabit, but within the church family, remain largely defensive of the marriage tradition. The social impact of cohabitation in contemporary Britain is demonstrated through socio-structural models that show that by denying many of the traditional roles for marriage, society begins to lose its cohesive structure.

Attitudes that characterise cohabitation are found to have parallels within Enlightenment philosophies that emerged as a reaction against many of the perceived abuses and inequalities associated with marriage, particularly as they affected women.

In addition to its sociology, cohabitation may be understood within Christian theology of relationships through interpretations of key passages in Genesis that focus on the nature of the relationship bond. Cohabitation and marriage are brought into a universal framework for relationships based on friendship: a 'Friendship Mapping' chart, a time-line diagram, incorporating love and commitment, is developed to illustrate the ways in which relationships may evolve from an encounter to cohabitation and marriage.

The outcome of this research is a call for an expansion in the teaching of the Christian ethics of marriage. Suggested ways to accomplish this are through marriage education, reaching out to couples getting married outside the church. For couples seeking to bring their relationship before God, there is support for the reintroduction of betrothal. There are two new proposals, for Committed Relationship and Celebrated Relationship. Committed Relationship, celebrated in either a religious or civil environment, is an extended form of betrothal that would give a cohabiting couple security and status in the public domain and, more importantly, confirmation of their commitment in return for certain legal protections. Celebrated Relationship would be a low-key, 'modern' church wedding, an alternative to a civil marriage ceremony, intended to help encourage more couples to marry in church.

From the researches carried out, two newly emerging lifestyle relationships have been identified that should be of concern to the church. The first is cohabiting singleness, where the rising age for marriage is encouraging casual and short-term relationships. The second is that of single parent families where one parent, usually the father, is deliberately excluded from the outset. Both are shown to have the potential to move the family structure even further from the Biblical norm than does cohabitation and are highlighted as areas for further study.

Declaration

Some of the arguments presented in this thesis have been expanded from my MA thesis entitled *Cohabitation as an Alternative to Marriage: A Theological Interpretation* submitted to the University College of Ripon and York St John, University of Leeds, in 1999. This applies particularly to the Boundary model (p 217-21) and 'Cone of Encompassment' (p. 221-7). The initial concepts were developed during discussions with my then supervisor, Revd. Greg Hoyland: they have been further expanded here to consider the impact of cohabitation on social cohesion.

There was no opportunity at that stage to carry out surveys that have provided a major input to the present thesis, other than to cull few brief comments from interested parties. My MA study concluded that cohabitation, as a relationship, is incomplete in consequence of its informality and may pose a threat to the integrity of society. Society has moved on since then and attitudes have probably already changed, providing the impetus for the present work.

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I wish to acknowledge the considerable support I have received during the research and preparation of this thesis from the Department of Theology, not least from my Supervisor, Dr. Robert Song, who has provided excellent direction and much needed encouragement throughout.

In addition I wish to thank those who have given very specific help: Revd Professor Jeff Astley (NEICE) for advice and discussion on designing questionnaires, Dr. Matthew Guest for advice on the presentation of the survey data and assistance in using SPSS (statistical analysis program), and Professor Walter Moberly for a discussion of Old Testament theology, in particular, interpretations of Genesis and Creation.

I am particularly indebted to the clergy and congregations in Harrogate who so willingly responded to my questionnaires and interviews. Their readiness to discuss the issues surrounding cohabitation has contributed a major input to my thesis. This also includes Rev. Rosemary J. Fletcher and her colleagues with whom I discussed the initiative by Caversham Methodist Circuit in developing marriage preparation courses jointly with RELATE. I am also indebted to Rt. Revd. John R. Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, Ven. John Oliver, former Archdeacon of Leeds, and Revd. Andrew Body for their discussions on marriage education.

Working as a part-time student presents its own difficulties of communication by not being 'on Campus'. Most of my work has been done from home, visiting Durham between one and three times per month, where possible, combining supervisory sessions with other events or library study. I am pleased to record my thanks for the friendly reception given on each and every visit from both academic and support staff.

Finally, but by no means least, I thank Margaret, my wife, for her support and encouragement throughout and who has had to accommodate my hiding away in my study for considerable lengths of time.

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Chapter 1

Cohabitation and Marriage

1.1 Introduction

Marriage is one of humankind's oldest institutions. It serves several functions: firstly, relationships between husband and wife and other members of their families are formally established. Secondly, marriage brings whole families into new relationships, creating structures within society that might not otherwise have existed and thirdly, through their genealogies, people know 'where they belong': their status is declared and in return, society confers certain legal rights and privileges not normally granted except through marriage. However, over the last forty years or so, couples living together in marriage-like relationships, often with no current intention of getting married, have challenged the established order. It is now thought that up to 2.2m couples may presently be cohabiting.[1]

Within a Western Christian theological context, both cohabitation and marriage may be seen to take their inspiration from creation. However, whereas marriage is centred on an intention for a lifelong commitment, cohabitation lies much more within the province of the couple themselves. Society no longer equates cohabitation with promiscuity or 'living in sin', judgmental terms conveying perceptions of being against traditional Biblical teaching and established Christian principles.[2] Relationships may now be conducted openly with a veneer of respectability.[3] It may even be argued that contemporary cultural attitudes encourage cohabitation. To be part of society, however, is to accept certain traditional norms, to form relationships in accordance with standards that enable it to maintain its equilibrium and flourish.

---

[1] Registrar General, 'Marriage, Divorce and Adoption Statistics', *Review of the Registrar General on Marriages and Divorces in 2004 and Adoptions in 2005*, Series FM2, no 32 (London: Stationery Office, 2007); ONE PLUS ONE, 'Cohabitation', http://www.opo.org.uk (Accessed 20 February 2008).

[2] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'living in sin' may be traced to a report of 1829 (but presumably was already in common use). An early allusion to the phrase 'living in sin' appears to be in '*The Passionate Pilgrim*', attributed to Shakespeare, but used in the sense of living in a sinful way (G. Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1787-93).

[3] Adrian Thatcher, *Liberating Sex: A Christian Sexual Theology* (London: SPCK, 1993), 107.

The approach to cohabitation here is not specifically an argument between Christians and non-Christians: there are committed Christians who cohabit prior to marriage or permanently as their chosen lifestyle, just as there are non-Christians who may embrace the Christian ethics of marriage. Christians do not all necessarily share in God's covenant for marriage even though they all share in God's promise for themselves.[4] Cohabitation, parentage outside of marriage and divorce and remarriage no longer carry the social stigmas that were attached to them forty or more years ago, but the church may still be accused of being unsympathetic where it adheres to what are perceived to be outmoded principles. Western society as a whole is now more inclined to develop its own codes of ethics and will no longer accept dogma from the church or any other authority without questioning its source and validity. An uncomfortable fact is that the church, even today, has great difficulty in formulating coherent responses to sexual issues, a prime example being same-sex relationships. Furthermore, throughout history, the church has tolerated abuses in marriage through strict adherence to a tradition that has imposed inequalities between husband and wife: until attitudes began to change in the middle of the twentieth century, the marriage liturgy constrained wives to 'love, honour and *obey*' (my italics) their husbands. Nevertheless, the church has at the same time subsumed a vast knowledge and experience of personal relationships that, I believe, still gives it authority to influence society.

Cohabitation may be regarded as a privatisation of marriage with couples able to set their own rules: a downside is that it has the potential to form an anonymous, amorphous raft of relationships as couples seek to assert rights to privacy, self-determination, and achievement. Nevertheless, if cohabitation, as a marriage-like relationship, did not fulfil a need within contemporary society, it would not exist. It is rare now for anyone today not to be aware of cohabitation and within the contemporary culture, there is considerable tolerance for couples living outside the formal structure of marriage, even though this may not amount to universal approval.[5] Already, cohabitation is beginning to threaten the

---

[4] Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity: Christian Marriage in Postmodern Times* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 99.

[5] I have a daughter who married after a long courtship that did not involve cohabitation, but whose marriage failed after a relatively short time, She found a new partner, lived together, started a family, then married. This was twelve ago. Our son married recently after living with a divorcee for several years in a loving, committed relationship.

marriage tradition that has long served humankind well. In this thesis, I wish to explore some of the origins and implications of cohabitation and how the church can address the issues involved without compromising its theology of marriage.

At the outset, I wish to make clear that my thesis specifically excludes same-sex relationships even though some of my comments may be applicable to such relationships where partners profess 'commitment' and an intention for stability. In the present context, cohabitation implies a heterosexual relationship. The introduction a Civil Partnership for same-sex couples, however, has had the effect of alerting cohabiting couples to the insecurity of their relationship. Currently, their only recourse is to marry, and though a simple civil marriage has always been available to them, the risk was that it would change the whole nature of their relationship, maybe more than they may be prepared to contemplate. The potential for the church to help such couples within the context of encouraging them to move eventually to marry is discussed in Chapter 8.

1.1.1 Definitions: Cohabitation and Marriage

The Oxford English Dictionary defines to 'cohabit' as

> to live together as husband and wife; often said of persons not legally married

whereas to 'marry' is

> to join in wedlock in matrimony; to join for life as husband and wife; to constitute as man and wife according to the laws and customs of a nation.[6]

The essential difference between cohabitation and marriage, according to these definitions, is mechanistic in that marriage lies within a legal or customary framework. Whatever may be implied by living as 'man and wife', nothing is said about love, commitment, intention, responsibility and all the other attributes that contribute to a fulfilling relationship, or the whole theology, sociology and psychology that affect an understanding of how the man-woman relationship satisfies fundamental human needs.

---

[6] J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner (eds.), *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd ed., 1991 reprint with corr.), s.v.

Any definitions for cohabitation and marriage as understood in this thesis need to embrace commitment, faithfulness and mutual support as well as being a sexual relationship, qualities that may be summed up as 'love'. I have therefore devised my own definitions for cohabitation and marriage.

1.1.1.1 Cohabitation

In the context of heterosexual relationships, my definition of cohabitation is as follows:

> **a heterosexual, consummated and committed co-residential relationship outside of marriage with a current intent for mutual support, faithfulness and stability.**

This is a rendering of definitions by several authors and focuses on the quality of the relationship. Cohabitation is a generic term that encompasses a continuum or spectrum of relationships from couples in short-term liaisons that have proved patently unstable from the start through to long-term cohabitation in which the couple feel they are effectively 'married'.

1.1.1.2 Marriage

Marriage in Western culture is fundamentally a legal act of union between a man and woman, embodying certain expectations and values that a faith community may seek to enhance as a social and family relationship. The basic definition of marriage I have adopted is:

> **a consummated, committed heterosexual relationship established according to local legal custom and with a publicly declared intent for mutual support, faithfulness and permanence.**

The important differences between cohabitation and marriage are the legal dimension and the intention to permanence rather than stability.

All marriages in the UK must satisfy certain legal requirements to ensure the probity of the union. When a marriage is celebrated through a religious ceremony, Christian or otherwise, the minimum requirements of the State must still be met with the exchange of vows and promises in the presence of a registrar, representing the State, and witnesses representing the community. If a wedding is celebrated in church, further restrictions under canon law may apply, particularly if one partner is divorced or not baptised.

Marriage confers certain legal benefits on the couple and their children. It also encourages wider family responsibilities through establishing kinship ties. A legal marriage is dissolved only through death of one spouse, annulment, or divorce, but importantly, these kinship ties remain.

1.1.1.3 Marriage and Cohabitation: Some Essential Differences

A major difference between marriage and cohabitation is that the couple's commitment, intentions, and aspirations are not declared as they are through the wedding ceremony. This leaves the relationship exposed in the sense that in the latter whatever informal promises are declared between the couple themselves, the perceived strength of the relationship becomes a matter of judgement, inferred through their behaviour and attitudes to each other. In the early stages of forming a relationship, partners will often discuss their relationship with trusted third parties and solicit advice, on the basis of 'do you think . . . ?', 'should I . . . .?' and so on to help them establish in their own minds the worth and future of their relationship.

Within long-term (or potentially long-term) cohabitation, there is a major division between non-nuptial and pre-nuptial cohabitation: pre-nuptial cohabiting couples may be expected to have a much clearer idea of their long-term aspirations, and it is this group that is mostly likely to interact with clergy and congregations (this has particular relevance to my surveys discussed in Chapters 4 and 5). They are often portrayed as 'living as married', anticipating their wedding, though as the surveys will show, have not necessarily considered all the implications of being married. A fundamental aspect is the relinquishing of their separateness: even though this process may be incomplete, they

nevertheless see marriage as right for them. Thus, it may be preferable to describe pre-nuptial cohabitation as a *convergence* towards 'living as married'.

Couples in non-nuptial cohabitation may be uncertain or even have no current intention to marry, though they may consider their partnership to be stable and have the potential for developing further. It must never be assumed that non-nuptial cohabiting couples will not eventually marry, even though many may find the transition from a casual relationship to the assumption of family responsibilities difficult to assimilate. Assuming they would be free to marry, the implication is that they do not see marriage as a viable option, at least in their current situation. The bonds of affection, faithfulness, and mutuality, loosely described as 'love' are established within a lifestyle that also places value on their separate identities. Both partners may contribute to their joint living expenses and lifestyle needs, but with each retaining control over their personal resources. Where there are any doubts or uncertainties in a relationship, at whatever level these may be found, the easy 'walk-away' option may be seen as their safeguard. A more serious drawback is if a partner uses threats to end a relationship as a means of coercion, leading to an asymmetry in how they relate to one another that will be discussed below.[7]

Unless a cohabiting couple make an overt move towards getting married, the basis of their relationship may remain largely unverifiable and alternative ways of demonstrating commitment must be found. Cohabitation shares with marriage at least the potential to form a lifetime relationship, but does not depend on any public or legal declaration and need not embrace any additional responsibilities. For this reason, the emphasis must be on stability rather than permanence, insofar as a relationship is 'long-term' relative to the needs and expectations of the couple. 'Long-term' is never easy to define: cohabitation

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[7] The acceptance that couples may freely form relationships as opposed to friendships contradicts some long-established precedents. In a majority of cultures, marriage would not be founded on the relatively modern notion of romantic love, a concept that may be traced back at least to novelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries such as the Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and many others. Instead, marriage was often a necessity for personal and family security and control over inheritance. Most marriages were arranged and relied upon a will to create domestic harmony: if love developed, this was a bonus. It is important here to distinguish between an arranged marriage that still involves a degree of consent between the partners as well as the families, and a forced marriage. There are indications that contemporary Muslim families in this country are forcing their daughters into marriage wholly against their will, over-riding all resistance. This may be a reaction against trends towards western attitudes by the younger generation within Muslim communities (see, for example, The Times, 4 January 2008, 32-3).

may be long-term for its own sake, or entered in the short-term in anticipation of marriage. This will be illustrated in Chapter 2 when the stability and duration of marriage with and without pre-marital cohabitation is discussed, from which it becomes clear that the duration of the whole relationship is a more relevant parameter.

Through what I call a mechanistic categorisation, cohabitation may be described according to its features and consequences, identifying typical circumstances that lead a couple to cohabit rather than marry.[8] A particularly interesting arrangement raised by Adrian Thatcher is that of 'LATS', couples 'living apart together', also referred to as 'semi-cohabitation'.[9] These are couples who ordinarily live apart, often alone, but consider themselves to be in a permanent relationship. As a lifestyle, 'LAT' appears to have spread from Europe, now to be found in this country.[10]

In the extreme are couples in short-term relationships that very quickly become unstable and inevitably break down. In principle, this is not so different from the routine of courtship, where a person may develop several close friendships before finding the partner with whom they want to form a life-long relationship. The process of living together presents a more complicated scenario: separating the qualities needed to sustain a lifetime relationship from the immediacy of sexual satisfaction may impede their judgement. Unintended pregnancy is often found to be the trigger that causes the relationship the break down.[11]

An alternative to a descriptive means of classifying cohabitation is to resolve the practical situations into two populations of asymmetric and symmetric relationships.[12]

---

[8] See, for example, Adrian Thatcher, *Living Together and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4-38.

[9] Thatcher, *Living Together*, 6.
My own experience, albeit from the 1960's when living together was not normative in the way it is today, supplements Thatcher's comments. I graduated at Manchester University to work in Harrogate, but Margaret still had three years study plus hospital houseman jobs to complete before qualifying and before we could get married. Our relationship was therefore conducted during some weekends and holidays. We had a commitment to each other and in this respect, could be regarded as 'LAT'.

[10] Economic and Social Research Council, 'One Person Households in England, Wales and France', *Population and Household Change. Research Results 1-13 (1997-8)*, No. 7, 1.

[11] Thatcher, *Living Together*, 21.

[12] Colin Buchanan, 'Defining Cohabitation', in Church of England, Diocese of Southwark, *Cohabitation: A Christian Reflection* (London: Board for Church in Society, 2003), 14 (henceforward 'Southwark').

Typically, asymmetric relationships may arise where the partners have different expectations: this in turn introduces a potential for tension between a desire for an intimate relationship and the degree of commitment each partner is prepared to give. A prime example of asymmetric relationships is when one or other of the cohabiting partners is not free to marry: often, this will be where there are legal impediments and/or that it would result in a bigamous marriage. A different type of asymmetric relationship, identified by Colin Buchanan, is the host-guest situation, for example, if one partner is sole owner of the property. The partners may feel they have an unequal stake in their relationship, leading to inequality in the practical demonstration of their commitment. A potential risk with asymmetrical relationships is that one or other of the partners may find reasons not to be fully committed: one partner may be in a position to exercise power over the other, not necessarily in all aspects of the relationship, but in certain aspects, leading potentially to coercion and abuse.

A noticeable recent trend is for there to be relatively large age differences between partners, men living with and/or marrying much older women and *vice versa*. The evidence is often anecdotal, but I am, myself, aware of several such situations. This too may be regarded as an asymmetric relationship that is not highlighted by other authors.

Within the marriage tradition, women have tended to see themselves to be disadvantaged through lack of education and career opportunity, at least in part, a consequence of being regarded as the property of her husband, and can place the husband in a position of power. There is no reason to suppose that traditional gender attitudes do not extend to cohabitation also, generating a large population of asymmetric relationships, particularly if partners entering their relationship have a mentality that does not anticipate an equitable lifestyle. Since a cohabiting couple has no authoritative agreement imposed upon them, asymmetry in their relationship may lead to a sense of insecurity and instability. The church has long been aware of asymmetric relationships in marriage, but needs to be alert to similar situations arising through cohabitation.

In a symmetric relationship, both partners would be entitled to marry, and be equally committed to creating a stable if not a long-term relationship. This may include an

expectation of marriage, even though factors in their lifestyle other than commitment such as house purchase and career development may dominate their current preoccupations.

Whatever the symmetry in their relationship, there are couples who consciously reject marriage preferring the perceived freedom from all control that characterises cohabitation.[13] There is no aspiration to make a public declaration of their commitment, declaring that it is sufficiently strong as to render marriage unnecessary, even that they are effectively married.[14] In this situation, the legal entitlements conferred on a couple through marriage are effectively rejected, relying, if necessary, on whatever social benefits are already available to each partner as a single person.[15] However, others do seek the additional legal benefits of marriage whilst continuing to cohabit, and this has shaped one of the major outcomes of this thesis in the context of encouraging greater stability in relationships.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The focus of my thesis is on heterosexual cohabitation that has the intention to form a stable, if not a long-term relationship (however one defines 'long-term'). Cohabitation is treated in a Christian theological context, in an attempt to suggest how the church can find new ways to reach out to cohabiting couples without compromising its core teaching on marriage.

My aims in this thesis are twofold: firstly, I intend to argue that the church should be more accepting of cohabitation, both within its theology and its pastoral practice. The second is to find ways for the church to encourage and promote greater integrity and

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[13] A non church-going male who has cohabited for 11 years (introduced by a respondent to the clergy survey) maintains that cohabitation is a means of sustaining a committed and stable relationship whilst preserving an illusion of freedom. He also believes that the longer a couple cohabits, marriage is needed less in terms of commitment and security. Two reasons that would encourage him to marry are if financial disadvantages increased or if there were children involved. He is of a view that as cohabitation becomes more established as a normative lifestyle, social pressures will remove many of the existing legal and financial disadvantages.

[14] It is not uncommon to find couples still associating cohabitation with common law marriage, though this lost all social and legal status in England after the Hardwicke Act of 1753.

[15] Church of England, General Synod Board for Social Responsibility, *Something to Celebrate: Valuing Families in Church and Society* (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), 112, (hereafter 'StC').

faithfulness in all marriage-like heterosexual relationships. I will endeavour to achieve these aims through the following objectives:

i) to develop an understanding of current trends in marriage and cohabitation;
ii) to seek an understanding of the Christian tradition on marriage and the value society places on marriage;
iii) to seek an understanding of contemporary clergy and congregational attitudes towards cohabitation and marriage and how they approach the challenges presented;
iv) to explore how traditional Biblical exegeses may be extended in ways more sympathetic to cohabitation;
v) to present cohabitation and marriage as part of a continuous spectrum of relationships linked through friendship;
vi) to explore how the church may seek to encourage greater stability in all heterosexual relationships through its marriage preparation, pastoral outreach and liturgy.

My aims and objectives are stated against a background of comment from the marriage tradition as represented by churches of different denominations. Since this thesis is looking at cohabitation from a Christian theological perspective, it is pertinent at this stage to consider the attitudes taken by the various denominations through recent reports and statements.

1.3 Theological Responses from the Church

Within the development of the theological tradition, marriage has become one of the cornerstones of Christian teaching and though the church has an awareness of cohabitation, my view is that it has not yet fully grasped its potential impact on both itself and society.

The Roman Catholic Church, through its Catechism, is constrained not to recognise marriage-like relationships outside their concept of Christian marriage.[16] Quoting *Gaudium et spes*, the Catechism states that marriage

> ... has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own special laws . . . God himself is the author of marriage . . . Marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures and spiritual attitudes.[17]

Whereas this acknowledges the changing nature of marriage to fulfil the needs of society, its core doctrine of indissolubility means that once the union has been consummated, the marriage bond cannot be broken. If the marriage breaks down and living together becomes impossible, for whatever reason,

> the spouses do not cease to be man and wife before God so are not free to contract a new union.[18]

Sexual relationships outside of marriage are declared to be fornication and a denial of God's intention for humankind: a sexual union between an unmarried couple is contrary to the dignity both of the human person and of human sexuality.[19]

The Church of England has raised specific concerns that are relevant to the discussion on cohabitation. After the 1969 Divorce Act made civil divorce much easier, the Marriage Commission of 1975, chaired by the Bishop of Lichfield, affirmed an ongoing necessity to take account of social developments in society but emphasised

> . . . . the importance of stable marriages and family life.[20]

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[16] Michael J. Walsh (ed), *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994) (henceforward 'Catechism'); Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor (ed.), *Sexuality, Marriage and Family. Readings in the Catholic Tradition* (Paris: University of Notre Dame, 2001).

[17] *Catechism*, paras. 1603-4; Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), http://vatical.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_ council/documents (1 October 2006).

[18] *Catechism*, para. 1649.

[19] Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), http://www.vatican.va/holy father/john_paul_ii/apsot_exhortations/, para. 4 (Accessed 10 October 2006), (henceforward 'FC').

[20] Church of England, Marriage Commission, *Marriage and the Church's Task: The Report of the General Synod Marriage Commission* (London: CIO Publishing, 1978), 1 (henceforward 'Lichfield').

A subsequent House of Bishops Working Party under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Winchester took a view that

> there are circumstances in which a divorced person may be married in church during the lifetime of a former partner,

but affirmed their belief that marriage is part of God's primary intention for humankind and that this should be reflected through love, permanence and faithfulfulness.[21] Winchester acknowledged that significant numbers of couples cohabit before marriage, but declined to expand on the implications of this. However, a parallel Working Party chaired by Bishop of Sherwood, enquired into how the church is reacting to changes in family life.[22] It raised several theological and social concerns regarding the relationship between love and sex, reflecting the traditional Christian view that

> the goodness of sexual intercourse is safeguarded by being kept within the special commitment of married love and that it is put at risk once sexual intercourse outside the marriage relationship is considered permissible.[23]

This Working Party concluded that although cohabitation could invoke goods similar to those attached to marriage, it often embodies a lowering of commitment and expectation. Partners are not always prepared to enter their relationship with equal intentions, leading to instability and insecurity.[24] In a social context, they expressed a view that cohabitation, without social or legal status, was deficient as a lifestyle, reflecting current trends towards informality and an overall lack of discipline prevalent throughout society. Their stance was to accept cohabitation only as a step towards marriage, not a relationship in its own right.[25] Although the findings of the Working Party were not accepted by Synod, the report highlighted growing concerns within the Anglican Church.

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[21] Church of England, House of Bishops, *Marriage in Church After Divorce* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), 50 (henceforward 'Winchester').
[22] See n. 14.
[23] *StC*, 113.
[24] *StC*, 114.
[25] *StC*, 114-5.

More recently, the findings from *Something to Celebrate* were revisited and extended through the initiative from the Diocese of Southwark, looking specifically at issues surrounding cohabitation. Its terms of reference required it to consider cohabitation in a theological context and to reflect on the validity of such relationships in a multi-cultural, multi-ethical, and multi-faith society.[26] This was a comprehensive body of work taking into account the views of many contemporary theologians as well as some opinions of lay contributors that find echoes in the attitudes of clergy and congregations reported here in Chapters 4 and 5. It was undertaken by a panel of twelve authors, all with direct connections to Southwark Cathedral and/or local churches. Whilst admitting that 'many young people do not enter lightly into cohabitation' the overall view of Southwark was that the church

> could not accept . . . long-standing, committed cohabitation, with no intention to marry . . . for members of the Christian Church.[27]

Some of their conclusions were not very specific. However, they did call for better education on the implications and consequences of cohabitation, though it was less clear how this could be implemented other than through a general recommendation for further research.

Many in the non-conformist churches have tended to be more relaxed towards relationships outside of marriage than the Roman Catholic and the more conservative factions within the Anglican Church, reflecting their emphasis on a pastoral approach. However, all subscribe to the primacy of marriage. Within the Methodist Church, marriage is regulated through its Standing Orders, codes of ethics and conduct agreed by the Methodist Conference.[28] Their primary stance is

> to welcome everyone who enquires about an intended marriage service in a Methodist Church.[29]

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[26] Southwark, 9.
[27] Southwark, 108-9.
[28] Methodist Church, *The Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, vol. 2 (Peterborough: Methodist House Publishing, 2001), (henceforward 'CPD'). The Methodist Conference reviews CPD annually.
[29] *CPD*, 753.

A Registrar normally establishes the legality of a marriage performed in a Non-Conformist church, prior to issuing a licence. The Minister may then treat marriage as a pastoral issue: it is not unknown for a minister to decline to officiate for reasons of conscience or because they are concerned about some aspects of the couple's relationship that do not accord with Christian ethics. There are some Methodist ministers, as will be evident in Chapter 4, who regard cohabitation as sinful and may refuse to marry a couple who have been living together.[30]

These reports reveal an awareness of cohabitation and some of the challenges it presents to the marriage tradition. However, there are tensions that are not satisfactorily resolved and through the aims and objectives detailed in 1.2, I attempt to provide answers to some of the questions raised.

1.4 Thesis Outline

In Chapter 2, empirical statements in the Introduction are quantified through interpretations of published statistical data from national surveys. These confirm that marriage rates in recent years have been falling, commensurate with a rise in the numbers of couples cohabiting. This trend is predicted to continue, establishing cohabitation as a normative lifestyle alongside marriage. A common assertion that cohabitation is less stable than marriage is not wholly supported by the data: a comparison of risk factors may even favour marriage plus pre-marital cohabitation. These results are compared with the limited data available for church marriages that also reflect a trend towards premarital cohabitation. Statistics for births outside of marriage suggest it would be unrealistic to conclude that cohabitation does not now involve families.

Central to the British culture and the Christian church is marriage, against which other lifestyle relationships are compared. The church's interpretation of marriage derived from Jesus' teaching on the Creation narratives and subsequent interpretations by Paul and the Early Church Fathers are discussed in Chapter 3. Some essential historical developments

[30] The protocol would then be to refer them to a colleague or, in extreme cases, to the District Chairman.

such as Reformation are highlighted to show how the major traditions developed, contributing to the differing interpretations of Christian marriage we now see in contemporary Britain.

In Chapters 4 and 5, attitudes to cohabitation by the church are explored through two major surveys of clergy and congregations representing the main denominations in the Harrogate area.[31] Two potential areas of tension emerge. The first is between church doctrine and the pastoral role to be dispensed by the clergy; the second is between clergy constrained by doctrine and congregations who bring community values into the church. There is almost universal agreement that Christian marriage presents the best basis for living together but opinions diverge over whether cohabitation may be accepted as a viable alternative or even as a stage towards marriage. There is strong support for the continued link between marriage and the State, recognising the risks posed to society through cohabitation as well as to family through its informality. Clergy and congregations acknowledge a need to address cohabitation but are concerned that their attitudes should not detract from the virtues of Christian marriage, though shortcomings in church teaching on marriage are revealed as a major source of concern.

In Chapter 6, sociological ideas bringing about new understandings to human relationships that engender freedom and equality, especially for women, developed during the period of enlightenment are discussed in the context of cohabitation. I show that cohabitation is not the same as common law marriage but exhibits a greater convergence with recent developments in civil marriage, particularly in USA, that give

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[31] My survey bears some resemblance to an inter-denominational survey conducted in Plymouth and South East Cornwall in 1992 (Lynda Le Tissier, 'The Pastoral Relationship between Church and Cohabitees', *Theology*, XCVI, no. 774 (1993), 468-76). Le Tissier was able to categorise clergy into three groups, 'Theorists', 'Idealists' and 'Pragmatists': the theorists professed little experience or knowledge of cohabitees in their congregations, but did not regard pre-marital cohabitation as a bar to officiating at their marriage. Their views on marriage identified with the Roman Catholic Church: to adopt a non-judgemental approach to cohabiting couples, but always in the hope of leading them on to marriage. The second group, the idealists, resorted to fundamental biblical teaching and rejected cohabitation to the extent that cohabitees would not be welcome in their congregations. The third group, the pragmatists, took an essentially pastoral approach and subject to the sensitivities of the congregation, would allow cohabitees to participate fully in the life of the church. Le Tissier managed to question 111 cohabitees amongst her congregations many of whom felt the church promulgated a negative attitude towards them by virtue of not being married (in contrast, very few respondents to my own survey reported in Chapter 5 admitted to having cohabited at any time). I have been unable to contact Le Tissier to discuss either her sampling methods or her results.

greater autonomy to spouses/partners than do more traditional forms of marriage.[32] An important outcome is the development of models to show how cohabitation and marriage interact sociologically and how cohabitation risks weakening the structural links that marriage brings to society.

In Chapter 7, it is argued through Biblical exegeses that key passages may have more to do with human relationships than institutions. However, this does not extend to a theological justification for cohabitation, more that the incorporation of the Christian ethics expanded in Chapter 3 should lead to greater stability in relationships. This is explored through the arguments presented by the major Christian traditions.

Though relationships may be dominated by sexual attraction in the early stages, I argue that the long-term sustainability of any relationship depends on developing a strong bond of friendship. Therefore, an embryonic theology of friendship is developed that provides a better understanding of the mechanisms at work in cohabitation and marriage and the ways relationships progress. The outcome is to link cohabitation and marriage through their similarities and essential differences, on to a continuum of relationships and to show how the development of a relationship may be described in terms of two parameters, 'friendship-love', and 'friendship-commitment'. It is concluded that friendship has a particular role in establishing the long-term stability of any relationship and provides a basis from which the church's pastoral role towards couples living together may be reinforced.

It is argued in Chapter 8 that the church needs to strengthen its pastoral role towards both cohabitation and marriage to encourage greater stability and faithfulness in all marriage-like relationships, encouraging the embracing of Christian ethics, and building on the value of friendship. This requires a more pro-active approach to relationship education and marriage preparation: particular initiatives are highlighted such as collaborative programmes with national agencies such as RELATE as a means of the church extending its pastoral role outside the immediate confines of the church family.

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[32] Even today, there can be confusion between cohabitation and common law marriage: couples in long-term relationships who regard themselves as effectively married emotionally may assume, incorrectly, that they have legal support.

I have developed two linked proposals to help integrate cohabitation into the Christian marriage tradition. The first is to extend recent proposals from elsewhere for the reintroduction of a betrothal liturgy intended to close the gap between cohabitation and marriage, with a new status called 'Committed Relationship'. Committed Relationship would incorporate the promises to faithfulness central to betrothal but also give the couple and their children, if any, certain legal protections through the signing of a Schedule (as for Civil Partnership). However, whereas Civil Partnership attracts the full legal rights as marriage, the legal protection given through Committed Relationship would be limited. The rite may take either a religious or civil form: where celebrated in church, it would invite God's blessing on the couple and clearly anticipate marriage at some time in the future. The civil equivalent would focus essentially on confirming their commitment.

The second proposal is for a revised church marriage liturgy called 'Celebrated Relationship'. The intention is to enhance the 'image' of church marriage and widen its attraction to cater for couples wanting a 'quiet' or relatively low cost wedding rather than the full 'white' wedding and who currently have little or no option but to resort to a civil ceremony.

As cohabitation becomes established, other more extreme relationships and lifestyles continue to emerge. From the statistical and anecdotal evidence, I identify a trend towards single parentage, especially by women. This generates a matrilineal rather than marriage-like relationship and has the potential to distort family life even further than does cohabitation and is a development that the church and other bodies will need to address in the future.

1.5 Methodologies

My thesis is approached from a Christian theological perspective but inevitably requires inputs from other disciplines to provide an understanding of the mechanisms involved in the changing attitudes to personal relationships. A subject such as cohabitation cannot be treated in isolation from its demographic and sociological implications. Almost everyone

has some anecdotal evidence for cohabitation, but a close analysis of published statistics is used to define the place cohabitation occupies within the population as a whole. Relevant passages from the Bible that underscore a Christian approach to relationships are examined in order to ascertain a deeper understanding of marriage. In support of both these approaches, two major empirical surveys of clergy and congregations have been carried out. Each of these contributory methodologies is described in turn.

1.5.1 Statistical Analysis

The primary evidence describing current and historical rates of cohabitation and marriage and anticipated trends up to year 2031 is found within statistics gathered through the General Household Survey (GHS), Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Census Returns, gathered nationally by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Government Actuary Department (GAD).[33] It is important to note that statistics do not necessarily distinguish motives for adopting a particular lifestyle, also, that the data collected through various agencies are for the population as a whole. They are sociological in nature and are reliant on interviewees making honest declarations regarding their marital status.[34] Gathering reliable information on cohabitation has, in the past, been difficult with couples reluctant to reveal their true status, though changes in attitude should help improve data accuracy.[35]

There are three caveats to be observed when using such data: firstly, whereas statistics from what are judged to be representative samples may reflect historical events with a degree of precision, extrapolation using statistical models to anticipate future trends

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[33] Disparities between the timing of the different surveys as well as the style of questioning lead inevitably to gaps in the data. The methodologies are based on questionnaires adapted and updated to take account of new situations: up until 1985, women only were questioned on their marital status, the question being 'Are you living together as husband and wife?'. From 1985 onwards, both men and women were questioned, and the style of questioning changed from 'living as husband and wife', to 'living as a couple'. The removal of references to 'marriage' but without introducing the term 'cohabitation' leaves the definition of lifestyle open to interpretation. From 1979 to 2000, respondents were asked specifically about pre-marital cohabitation in respect of their current marriage and by 1998, questions were asked about all previous relationships (John Haskey, 'Cohabitational and Marital Histories of Adults in Great Britain' *Population Trends* 96 (London: Office for National Statistics, 1999), 13).

[34] Kathleen Kiernan, 'Cohabitation in Western Europe', *Population Trends* 96 (London: Office for National Statistics, 1999), 26.

[35] Government Actuary Department (henceforward 'GAD'), '*Marital Status Projections*', http://www.gad.gov.uk/marital_status_projections/2003/cohabitation_ assumptions.htm (Accessed 15 March 2004).

usually relies upon certain parameters being constrained and needs to be treated with caution when used to justify an argument. Secondly, current and historical statistics are only 'snapshots' of what is in being at the time of the particular survey. Thirdly, responses to a survey are always conditioned by the nature of the questions themselves and how they are presented, so need to be reinterpreted with care when used in a specific context. In the extreme, questions may be worded to anticipate certain responses.[36]

1.5.2 Biblical Exegesis

The Christian tradition has been described as a 'textualised religion' that has always regarded the canon of literature that forms the Bible as the pre-eminent authority on Christian faith and practice.[37] The reality of this is expanded in Adrian Thatcher's eight principles of Biblical interpretation.[38]

Interpretation is not absolute: *what the Bible says and how the Bible speaks are not the same thing.*[39] The Bible is an historical record of ancient Israel through to the beginnings of the Christian church and the product of many different authors over several thousand years. This can result in apparently conflicting views on many issues. Therefore, the literal text needs to be continually reinterpreted to extract the meaning for the tradition and its underlying doctrine for today.[40] Following on from Thatcher's second principle, *that as a matter of theological method, Christology precedes ethics and shapes them,* the hermeneutic adopted here is to focus on the role of the Gospels to interpret the Old Testament in the light of Jesus' teaching on marriage.[41] In this approach, the re-evaluation creation becomes pivotal and central to my argument: key verses such as Gen 2:24 that have become embedded in the marriage liturgy contain insights beyond the obvious description of marriage. Using published Old and New Testament biblical exegeses plus other recent scholarship, the relevant passages are re-examined to reveal some

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[36] These factors also feature in the surveys reported in Chapters 4 and 5.
[37] George Lindbeck, 'Barth and Textuality', *Theology Today* 43 (1986-7), 361; see also Stephen C. Barton, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and the Family' in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Context* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 4-5. I do not wish to discuss Christian literature not included in the canon such as the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, and Philip.
[38] Adrian Thatcher, *Theology and Families* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 44.
[39] Barton, *Family in Theological Context*, 6.
[40] Thatcher, *Families*, 44-6.
[41] Thatcher, *Families*, 44.

specifically Christian ethics that have supported the marriage tradition as it has developed in its various forms over the centuries.

The transition from a Biblical interpretation through to the development of our contemporary understanding of marriage, in effect, the marriage tradition, was shaped by the teachings of Paul and the Early Church Fathers, continuing through to the Reformation and then the emergence of the various denominations as the church sought to meet the challenges of a continuously changing culture. Throughout this process, the Bible has been regarded as normative and I show how the essential ethics of marriage that support the later discussions can be traced back to fundamental biblical teaching.

An attempt is made to explore how biblical interpretations on marriage may be expanded to understand the range of personal relationships, including those outside marriage. There is support for the reintroduction of betrothal (in a modernised form), and the distinction between betrothal and marriage is therefore an important contribution to the argument.

Within this context, the interactions between cohabitation and marriage are explored. Firstly, it is demonstrated how cohabitation and marriage contribute different levels of cohesion to society as a whole, modelling each by means of a 'Cone of Encompassment'. The model is developed to show how relationships interact to form cooperative bonds that enhance the structure of society. Secondly, an embryonic theology of friendship is developed incorporating Biblical and classical ideas on friendship that enables cohabitation and marriage to be interpreted within a much wider framework of relationships. From this, I have devised a universal presentation to illustrate how relationships develop and transform.

There are many other passages in the Bible relating to marriage, notably in Hosea, where the role of forgiveness is demonstrated. This has not been incorporated explicitly, but is included as one of the key qualities of friendship. There are other references to marriage in 1 Peter 2:18-3:7 and 1 Timothy 2:18-3:7 and 6:1-2. Here, marriage is described in the context of the traditional household codes that were the basis of society at that time. Important though these may be, they are not central to my main argument.

1.5.3 Empirical Surveys

Within the aims of the thesis, to determine how the church as a whole may find ways forward to address changing social attitudes, the views of clergy and congregations within my own locality have been sought. This provided some interesting perspectives on relationships, but showed strong support for marriage against which all other relationships are compared.

Two separate surveys of clergy and congregations were carried out amongst churches representing the mainstream denominations, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, URC, and Evangelical Church to determine attitudes to cohabitation.

For logistical reasons, the surveys were conducted in the Harrogate area: it is where I live and since much of the work was done through personal approaches, having some familiarity with all the churches involved enabled me to capitalise on local good-will and encourage a more willing response.[42] To provide a background to this work, a profile of the town plus comparisons with nearby urban areas is developed in Appendix I. Inevitably, a town like Harrogate does not reflect the multi-cultural and ethnic mix of larger conurbations such as Leeds and Bradford, but neither clergy nor congregations would consider themselves wholly unaware of attitudes and problems elsewhere.

My original intention was to conduct a single survey to determine how clergy from the mainstream denominations in Harrogate approach cohabitation and its attendant issues through their pastoral oversight. However, during the course of discussions with the clergy, it quickly became apparent that the views of congregations on the effectiveness of the pastoral care extended to cohabiting couples both by their peers as well as the clergy should be sought.

Both surveys were conducted through the medium of a questionnaire followed up by interviews: the clergy and congregation questionnaires are reproduced in Appendices II and III. These surveys were major undertakings in terms of preparation, execution, and

[42] The Harrogate area includes the neighbouring town of Knaresborough: these two townships are close and linked culturally and politically.

analysis. The results are summarised numerically in Appendices IV and V: the justification, logistics, and discussions of the results are expanded in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

1.6 Assumptions, Qualifications and Exclusions

There are a number of qualifications that need to be stated. The approach to cohabitation and marriage is from a Christian but largely non-denominational perspective (the direct experience of the author is mainly from within the Methodist and Anglican traditions).[43] In a wider context, I am aware of other faith cultures within the UK and city areas in particular where the cultural and religious practices of other faiths may predominate. To widen this study to the relationships within and between different faith groups is beyond the scope of the present work, although in principle, many of the conclusions may have application to other cultures.

Both cohabitation and marriage give rise to legal issues. Any attempt to address these in detail would require specialist knowledge outside my experience, though general comments may be made to illustrate a particular argument. This applies particularly to the discussion on Committed Relationship in Chapter 8.

The discussions in this thesis are limited to heterosexual marriage-like relationships. These exclude other groups who find fulfilment through related lifestyles: firstly, there are those who reject any sort of permanent relationship, instead finding fulfilment through being essentially unattached. Celibacy cannot be assumed, only that people in this group are not prepared to enter into long-term commitments that tie them to another person. Any relationships that are formed are likely to be transient or short-term in nature, founded entirely in the present and in denial of any long-term benefits or intentions.

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[43] Although baptised in the Anglican Church, I have grown mostly within the Methodist tradition. I also have relatives who are Roman Catholic through a late aunt converting on or about the time she married in the 1920s. Her family have remained Roman Catholic through the subsequent four generations, though in recent years, one wedding has been inter-denominational wedding. My wife is Anglican and we consider ourselves to be ecumenical.

Secondly, there are (usually) women who are determined to move their lifestyle even further away from marriage by opting for intentional single parenthood, deliberately excluding the biological partner. This will be discussed briefly in Chapter 8.

The third group comprises those in same-sex relationships. The partners may consider themselves in some sort of 'marriage', an attitude enhanced recently through the introduction of Civil Partnership.[44] Such relationships are not discussed here since they raise more arguments than can be answered in the present context.

A different situation arises where cohabitation is for the purpose of care and/or companionship, such as two persons sharing a house but who are not and have no intention or inclination to be in a sexual relationship. They may show true commitment to each other but remain outside my definition for cohabitation. Neither do they come within the scope of civil partnership (and with its association with homosexuality, would not want to). They will tend to have very different expectations from their relationship and require a slightly different treatment to that offered here. Nevertheless, although not addressed explicitly, such situations are touched upon in the survey responses and subsequent discussions.

[44] Civil Partnership is referred to as 'gay marriage' in USA and frequently referred to similarly in the UK. This is incorrect: marriage is, by definition, a heterosexual relationship, and by tradition, one that is consummated. Civil Partnership requires no more than that the couple share a residence.

Chapter 2

Cohabitation and Marriage: Statistical and Empirical Evidence

In the previous chapter, I presented some outline statements on cohabitation, mostly derived from empirical and anecdotal sources. The purpose of this chapter is to quantify and discuss current trends in marriage and cohabitation in contemporary society using published data. The emphasis is on cohabitation in Britain; nevertheless, I present some statistical and other evidence from mainland Europe and other cultures that demonstrate that cohabitation is not unique to Britain but is a consequence of changing social attitudes worldwide, and how variants in marital customs incorporate practices that blur the distinction between being single and married.

2.1 Statistics for Marriage

During the period over which cohabitation has become common practice, the statistics reveal a steady decline in marriage. The percentage of women who are married has fallen from 75% in 1976 to just over half, 53% in 1998, whereas the number in all heterosexual marriage-like relationships, has declined much more slowly:-

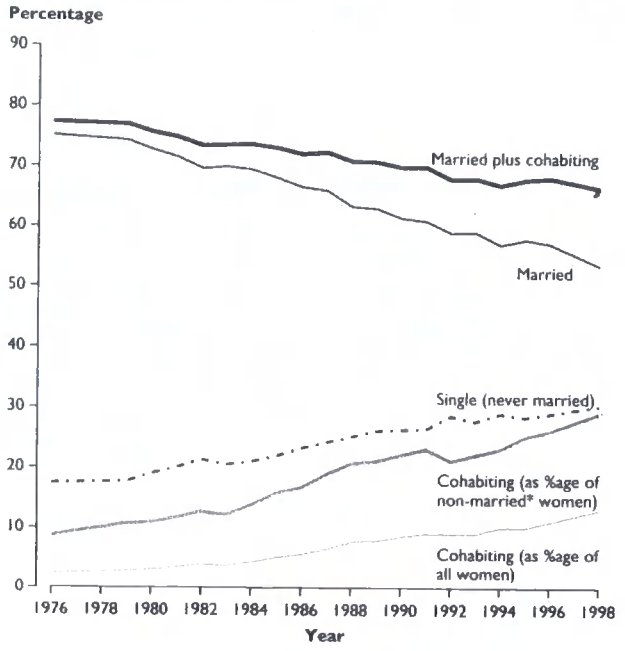


Fig. 2.1 Marital Status of Women in Great Britain 1976–1998.[1]

[1] John Haskey, 'Cohabitation in Great Britain: Past, Present and Future Trends - and Attitudes', *Population Trends* 103 (London: Office for National Statistics (ONS), Spring 2001), Fig. 3. These

Figure 2.1 also shows how the number of women cohabiting, or remaining single has risen dramatically. This trend is emphasised by a similar decline in all first-marriage rates, expressed as number per thousand for all single persons (England and Wales). For males, the rate has fallen from 82.3 in 1971 to 26.6 per thousand in 1999; for females, the corresponding figures are 97.0 and 33.5 per thousand.[2] The data reveals some significant differences when analysed by age cohort. Over the period 1991 to 2003, first-marriage rates for both men and women under 30 have declined dramatically, and are anticipated to decline further at least up to 2013 whereas rates for older groups are much more stable, Fig. 2.2. (Projections beyond 2013 assume that marriage rates for all age groups remain substantially constant, the main influence being demographic data).

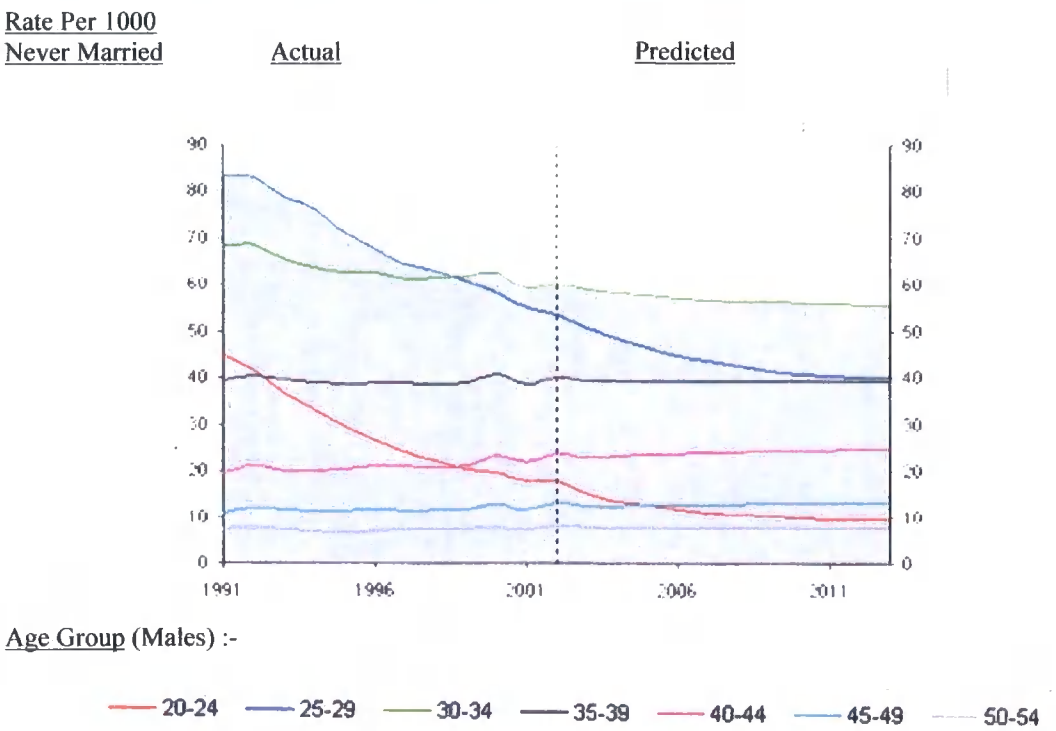
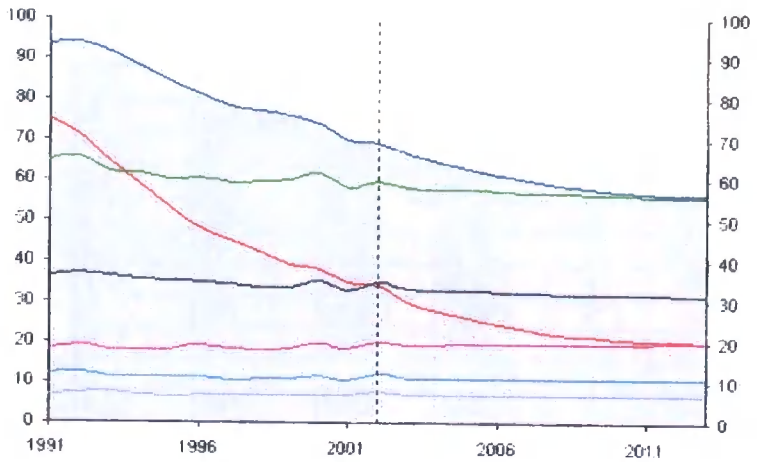


Fig. 2.2(a) Actual and Predicted First-Marriage Rates for Males, 1991 to 2013.

figures, derived from the General Household Survey (GHS) and 1976 Family Formation Survey (FFS), apply to women only.

[2] National Tables, *Population Trends* 105 (London: ONS, Autumn 2001), Table 9.1.

Rate Per 1000
Never Married Actual Predicted



Age Group (Females) :-

20-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50-54

Fig. 2.2(b) Actual and Predicted First-Marriage Rates for Females, 1991 to 2013.[3]

The interpolation of marriage rates from the graphs shows that a total rate for all men under 55 years of the order of 272 per thousand in 1991, has fallen to 213 in 2003 and expected to fall further to 191 by 2013. This result is consistent with the finding that between 1971 and 1999, the mean age of first marriage rose from 24.6 to 30.1 for men and 22.6 to 28.0 for women.[4]

The influence of demographic data is such that the observed decline in total numbers of all marriages, including remarriages, over the ten years 1992 to 2002 may to recover slightly until about 2021, remaining at a level of about 270,000 per year up to 2031, Fig 2.3 :-

[3] GAD *'Marital Status Projections'*, (Accessed 19 May 2005).
[4] National Tables, *Population Trends* 105 (London: ONS, Autumn, 2001), Table 9.1.

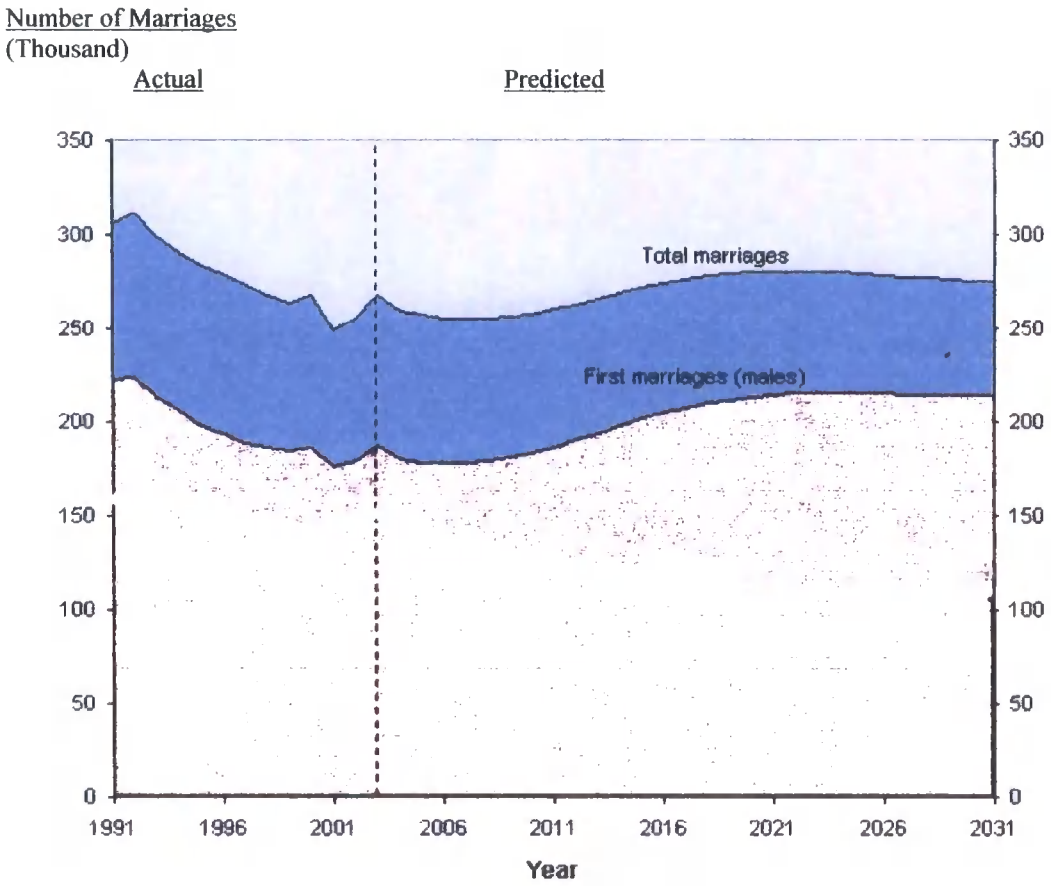


Fig. 2.3 Actual and Predicted Numbers of Marriages, 1991 – 2013.[5]

2.2 Statistics for Cohabitation

Figure 2.1 also shows that as marriages and marriage rates have been declining, the number of women cohabiting as a percentage of all non-married women has risen from 8% in 1979 to 31% in 1998, with a similar percentage remaining single. Data culled from the General Household Survey (GHS) and Labour Force Survey (LFS) confirms an upward trend in cohabitation rates for both males and females, Fig. 2.4 :-

[5] GAD, '*Marital Status Projections*' (Accessed 19 May 2005).

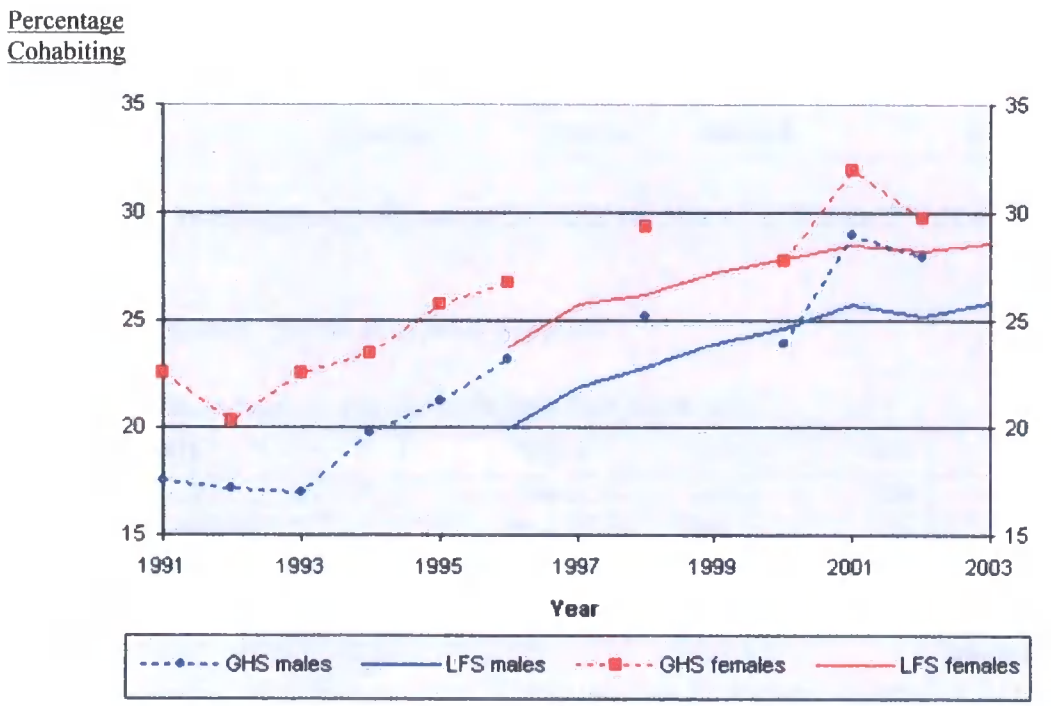


Fig. 2.4 Percentages of Never-Married Population Aged 18 – 59 Cohabiting, England and Wales, 1991 – 2003.[6]

The dataset is clearly incomplete due to different survey methods and definitions of cohabitation, as discussed in Chapter 1, but the results all conform to a similar pattern.

When the data are analysed according to age group for three specific years, 1992, 1996 and 2003, there is a systematic increase in cohabitation for both males and females expressed as the percentage of those never married, particularly between the ages 24 and 56 years. The proportions for older groups are much lower and here there are other factors to take into account such as companionship. The peak for all three years occurs in the 30 to 34 years age group, Fig. 2.5 :-

[6] GAD, '*Marital Status Projections*' (Accessed 19 May 2005).

Percentage of Never-Married Males Cohabiting (England and Wales)

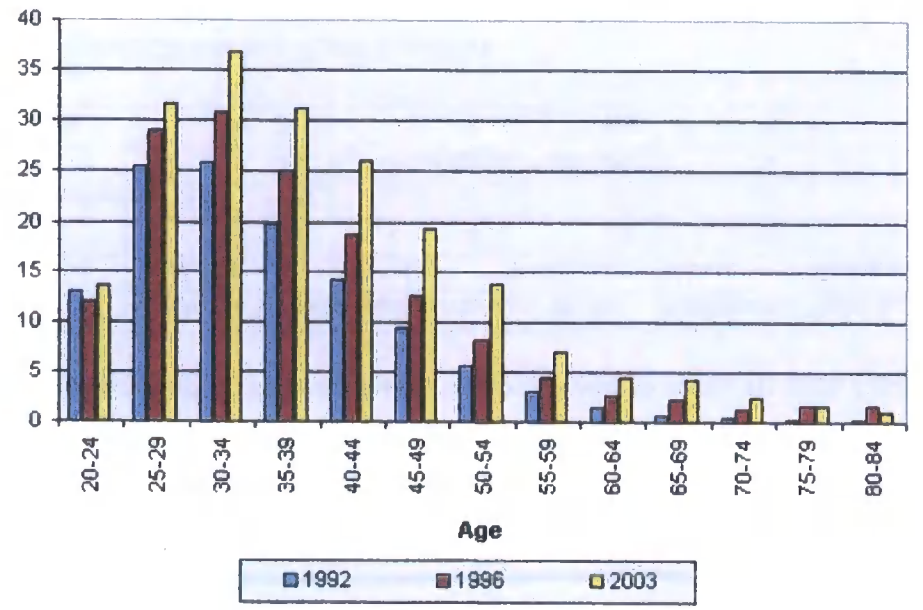


Fig. 2.5(a) Estimated Percentages of Never-Married Males Cohabiting.

Percentage of Never-Married Females Cohabiting (England and Wales)

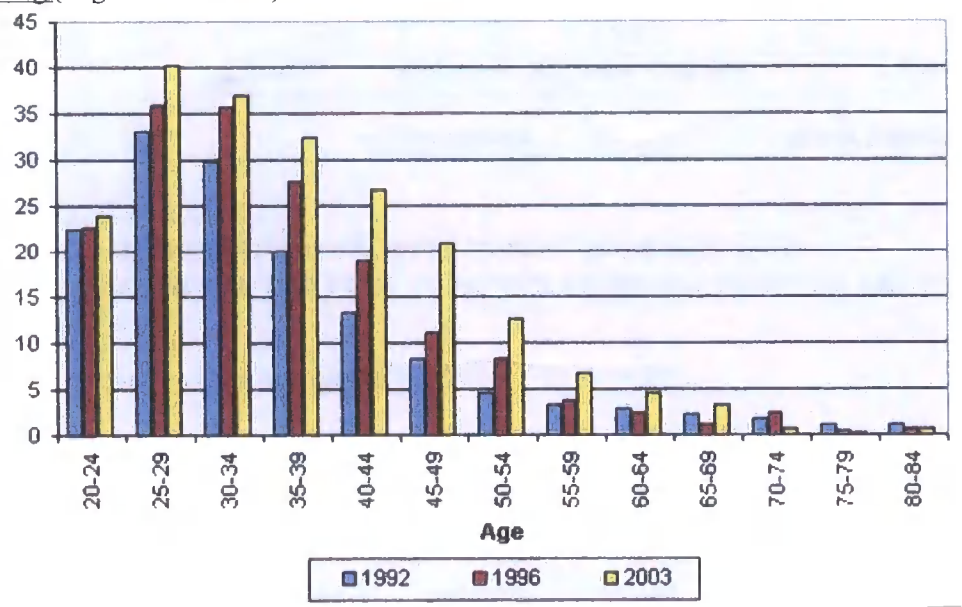


Fig. 2.5(b) Estimated Percentages of Never-Married Females Cohabiting.[7]

Within the limitations of the data, the prediction is that the percentages of those never married who are cohabiting will continue to rise steadily at least until 2031, the cut-off in the projection, Fig 2.6 :-

[7] GAD, '*Marital Status Projections*' (Accessed 19 May 2005).

Percentage
Cohabiting (England and Wales)

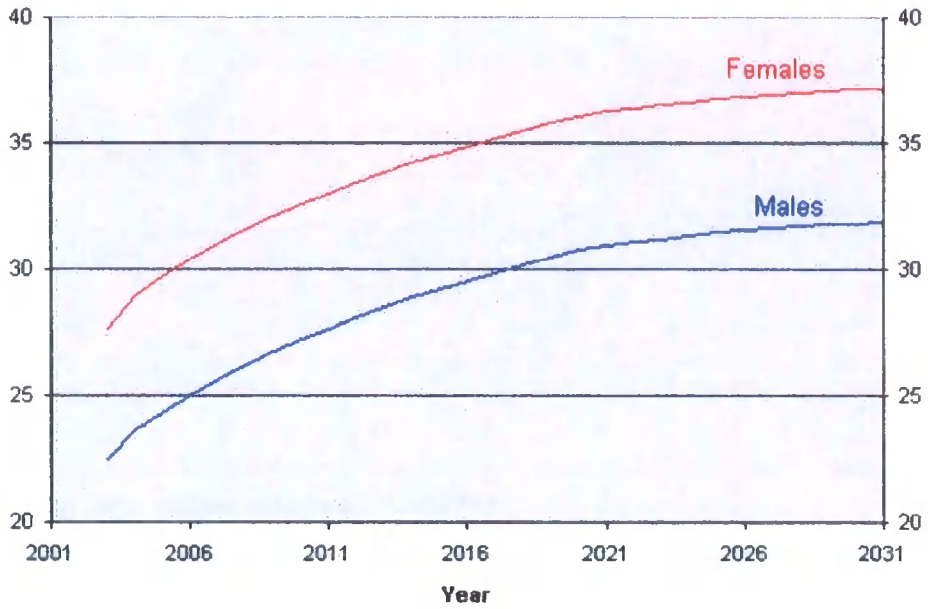


Fig. 2.6. Projected Percentages of Never-Married Population Cohabiting, Aged 18–59.[8]

As a measure of what the statistics mean in absolute terms, there were estimated to be 1.56 million cohabiting couples in England and Wales in 1996, about 1 in 8 of all couples, predicted to rise to 2.96 million by 2021, representing more than 1 in 5 of all couples.[9] Moreover, the proportion of single persons cohabiting is also expected to rise from 66% and 69% for men and women in 1996 to 80% and 84% respectively by 2021.[10]

Statistics for women who admitted to cohabiting with their future husband before marriage show a dramatic rise from virtually none in 1956 to about 80% in 1992, Fig 2.9 :-

[8] GAD, '*Marital Status Projections*' (Accessed 19 May 2005).
[9] Haskey, 'Cohabitation in Great Britain', 15. See also 1.1.
[10] The earlier figures probably underestimated the proportion of women cohabiting, since many would describe themselves as 'married' (K. Dunnell, *Family Formation 1976* (London: Office of Population and Census Surveys, 1979)).

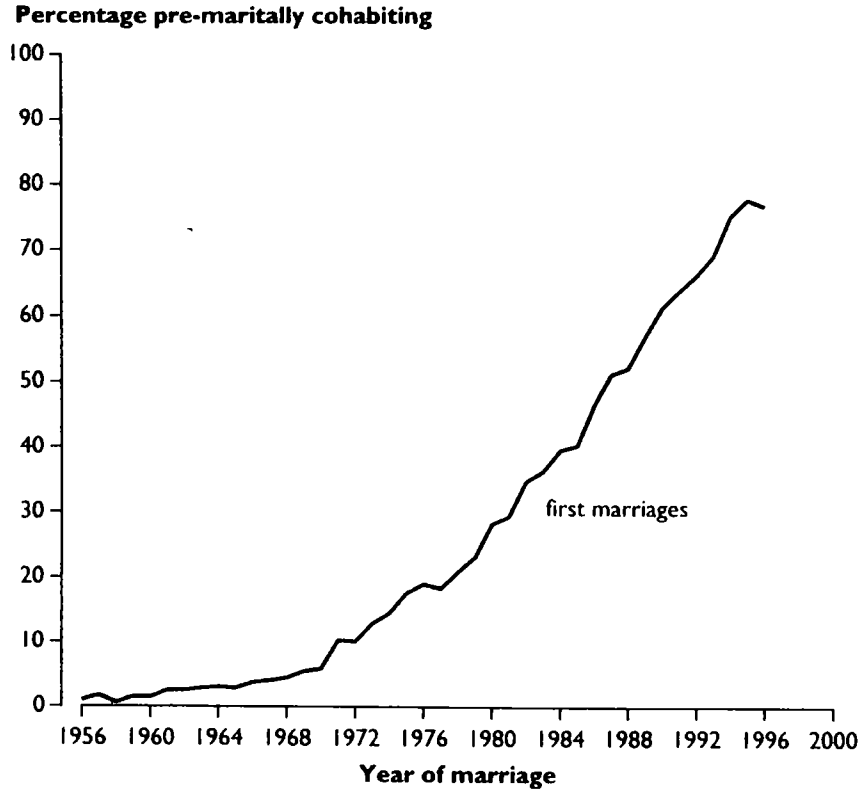


Fig 2.9. Pre-Marital Cohabitation Before First Marriage (Women, First Marriage).[11]

A more detailed 'Omnibus' survey, a prototype for future GHS surveys, directed towards the extraction of additional historical relationship data has now been introduced.[12] The marriage data is analysed according to whether or not it is preceded by pre-marital cohabitation: for data published in 1999, in the period 1950/1954, virtually all adults entered their first union via marriage without pre-marital cohabitation. Forty years later, this number had fallen to about 25%. Over the same period, the number of first marriages preceded by pre-marital cohabitation had risen from almost zero to 54%. A further 21% of couples formed their first union through cohabitation that did not lead to marriage.[13] Thus the profile of relationships according their manner of formation has over the course of a few decades, changed considerably. This raises questions about the influence of cohabitation on relationship duration and stability, considered next.

[11] John Haskey, 'Cohabitation in Great Britain', 11.
[12] Haskey, Marital Histories, 13-23.
[13] Haskey, 'Marital Histories', Fig. 3.

2.2.1 Cohabitation and Marriage: Duration and Stability

The conclusion drawn from early statistical data that record the duration of cohabitation up to the time of interview is that the median duration for pre-marital cohabitation for women in Great Britain aged 20 to 39 years is 17 months. This may be compared with a median duration of 19 months for cohabitations that dissolved through separation.[14] These figures are for 'closed' relationships, that is, ones that have already ended or where there is a fixed commitment to marriage. For ongoing open-ended relationships, Kiernan used life-table analyses to estimate a median value of 28 months.[15] From more recent data for 2006, the average length of a cohabiting relationship is estimated to be 6.9 years, a significant increase, rising to 8.5 years where a couple have children.[16] Such figures are now on a par with the duration of many marriages: although this is small compared with the fifty or more years often reported for marriage, the qualification is that such marriages will have been formed long before cohabitation was generally tolerated and at a time when divorce was still both difficult and expensive. Given that many marriages now end in divorce or separation after relatively short periods, these figures provide an indication that some couples are capable of sustaining stable relationships outside of marriage.

Haskey has made further attempts to determine median values for duration for all cohabitation by including data on previous relationships: for men it appears to have increased from just under two years in 1986 to over three years in 1998 and for women, from about one and a half to three years. This is an area where the data are very imprecise, but the trend in duration of cohabitation is clearly upwards, Fig. 2.7 :-

[14] Kiernan, 'Cohabitation', 29.
[15] Kiernan, 'Cohabitation', Table 6.
[16] One Plus One, 'Cohabitation', http//opo.org.uk (25 February 2008).

Duration (months)

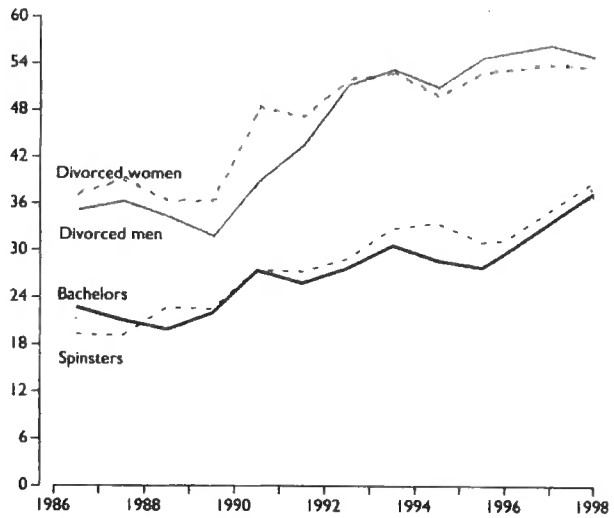


Fig. 2.7 Trends in Median Duration of Cohabitation
For Single and Divorced Men and Women, 1986–1998.

An increasing duration of pre-marital cohabitation before first marriage with upper and lower quartiles is shown in Fig 2.8 :-

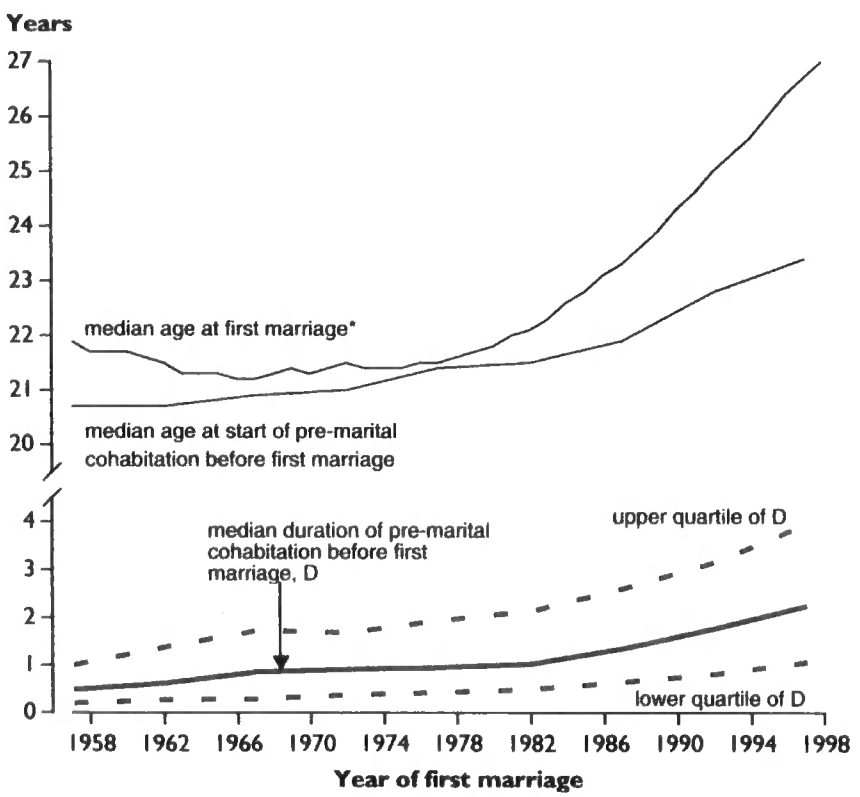


Fig 2.8 Trend in Median Age at Start of Cohabitation, 1957–1998

Fig. 2.8 also shows how the age at which partners are entering both cohabitation and marriage is increasing: the trend towards longer periods of living together is illustrated by a widening gap between the commencement of cohabitation and marriage. Both cohabitation and marriage are subject to the trend towards partners delaying forming permanent or quasi-permanent relationships. Whether this is symptomatic of partners entering their relationship with a greater maturity, a reluctance to marry sooner, or simply delaying marriage for economic or other reasons is not known. The apparent rising trend suggests that as a lifestyle, many cohabiting couples are living in potentially stable relationships.

2.2.2 Cohabitation, Family, and Unmarried Parent Statistics

Although the emphasis in this thesis is on cohabitation as a relationship, the impact of cohabitation on families cannot be ignored.

An analysis of dependant children in 2004 shows that 66% lived within married couple family (though not necessarily the progeny of both parents), 11% lived with a cohabiting couple and 29% in a lone-parent family.[17] Within the population of cohabiting families, the same database revealed that slightly more than half (51%) had one child, 35% two children and 14% three or more children. This says nothing about the parentage of the children, only that they are living with a cohabiting couple in a family situation: anecdotal evidence suggests that this will include many 'step-family' situations. There is also a perception that some couples give priority to having a family, only then moving on to marriage for the additional security this brings.

Data from the 1990s suggest that children brought up in a cohabitating partnership are more likely to end up in single-parent families: instability through step-family situations could be a significant cause. It has been found that up to half of cohabiting parents split up within ten years of the birth of a child compared with 12.5% of couples who married before their first child was born.[18] Conversely, one trigger that encourages a cohabiting couple to marry is often starting a family.

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[17] National Statistics Online, 'Families: Dependant Children', http://www.statistics.gov.uk (Accessed 25 February 2008).

[18] Jonathan Gershuny and Richard Berthoud, *New Partnerships? Men and Women in the 1990s*, (University of Essex: ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change, June 1997), 4. See also Thatcher, *Living Together*, 21.

There is statistical evidence that the traditional view that families are better nurtured from within marriage may be changing. Over the past thirty-five years, numbers of live births have remained essentially constant, fluctuating between about six and eight hundred thousand per year:-

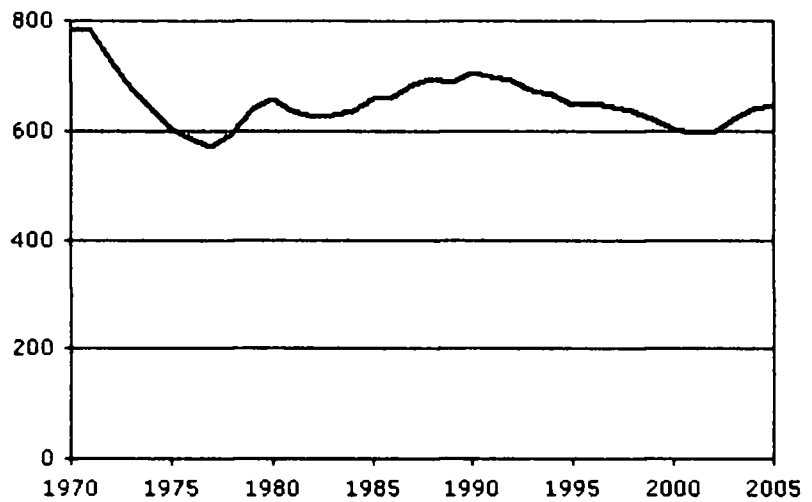


Fig. 2.12 Live Births in England and Wales.[19]

The same data source reveals that from 1995 to 2005, the proportion of live births to unmarried mothers has risen from 30% to 42.8%. These data are not analysed by age group and will include a small number of accidental pregnancies to teenage and under-age girls as well as some to single mothers not in any sort of permanent relationship, sometimes opting for intentional single parenthood as their preferred lifestyle. Though my claim is unsubstantiated, my interpretation is that a majority of these births are to cohabiting couples and whether or not they plan to marry, the inference is that cohabitation is, increasingly, embracing family life.

2.2.3 Stability of Cohabiting Relationships

Using the 'Omnibus' dataset a comparison of the relative stability of cohabitation and marriage and the influence of pre-marital cohabitation becomes possible.[20] The data shows that when cohabitation is compared with marriage plus pre-marital cohabitation, restricted to couples who have had only one co-residential relationship, for women entering their first union at ages 20-24 in the 1980s, cohabitation was 4.3

[19] National Statistics Online, 'Population', http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ (Accessed 1 March 2007).
[20] Statistics such as these ignore any period of friendship or 'engagement' prior to living together, and imply the relationship was not already sexual.

times more likely to fail.[21] 'Risk factors' calculated for cohabitation relative to marriage with pre-marital cohabitation for other birth cohorts range from 1.6 to 9.4, unions formed at an early age attracting the higher risk of failure.[22] A strong possibility is that many couples are prepared to enter a marriage-like relationship without clear long-term expectations or intentions to permanence.

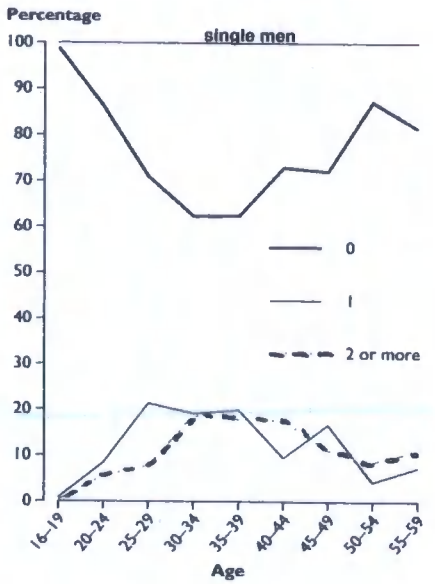
A comparison of first marriage with and without pre-marital cohabitation may be made using the same dataset: this suggests that for women in the 20-24 years cohort, marriages entered via pre-marital cohabitation were 30% more likely to fail than if entered directly.[23] However, many couples now regard the wedding as confirmation of an on-going relationship, not the start of marriage and living together. Instead of comparing the separate durations of cohabitation with marriage, I would argue that greater attention should be given to the total length of a relationship, treating pre- and post-marital cohabitation as one. The evidence from the data is that the risk factor falls dramatically to a value typically slightly less than unity, suggesting that pre-marital cohabitation may actually be beneficial to marriage.[24] One problem is in defining the start of the relationship, when it begins to assume the mantle of permanence. Nevertheless, this finding above is consistent with the evidence that the age at first marriage is rising, in part a consequence for the wedding itself being postponed for economic and other factors and not that couples are entering 'lifetime' relationships at a later stage. The discussion so far has been carried out on the assumption of single unions, but in reality, many adults enter more than one sequential relationship, either through cohabitation or remarriage: the impact of multiple relationships is treated in the next section.

2.2.4 Cohabitation and Multiple Relationships

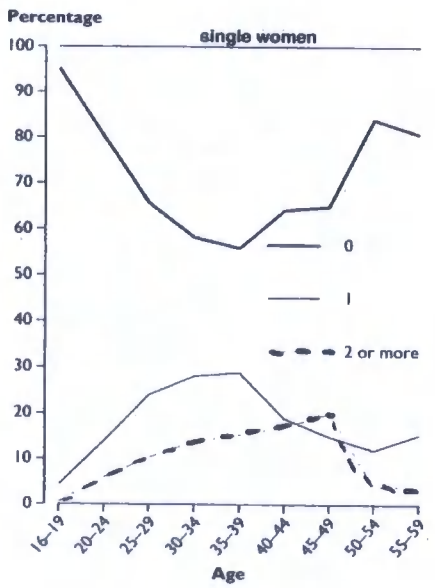
There is a commonly held assumption that unmarried persons may have had several relationships by the time they reach their mid-thirties, and this is partially supported by statistics.[25] Haskey's data showed that for cohabiting single men and women, a

[21] Haskey, 'Marital Histories', Table 6.
[22] Haskey, 'Marital Histories', Tables 6(A), 6(B). The sub-division of the sample into birth cohorts led to many of the comparisons being statistically not very robust because of the small numbers involved.
[23] Haskey, 'Marital Histories', Table 5.
[24] This supports the modelling for cohabitation and marriage as part of a continuous spectrum of relationships based on a theology of friendship, to be developed in Chapter 5.
[25] Haskey, 'Cohabitation in Great Britain', 13. The figures relate to co-residential relationships and exclude 'one-night stands'.

significant proportion of those in the age range 25 to 39 are likely to have had one or more previous cohabiting relationships that have ended through separation rather than marriage. Within this age range, up to 20% of single men and 30% of single women may have had two or more previous cohabiting relationships, Fig. 2.10 :-



(a) Single Men

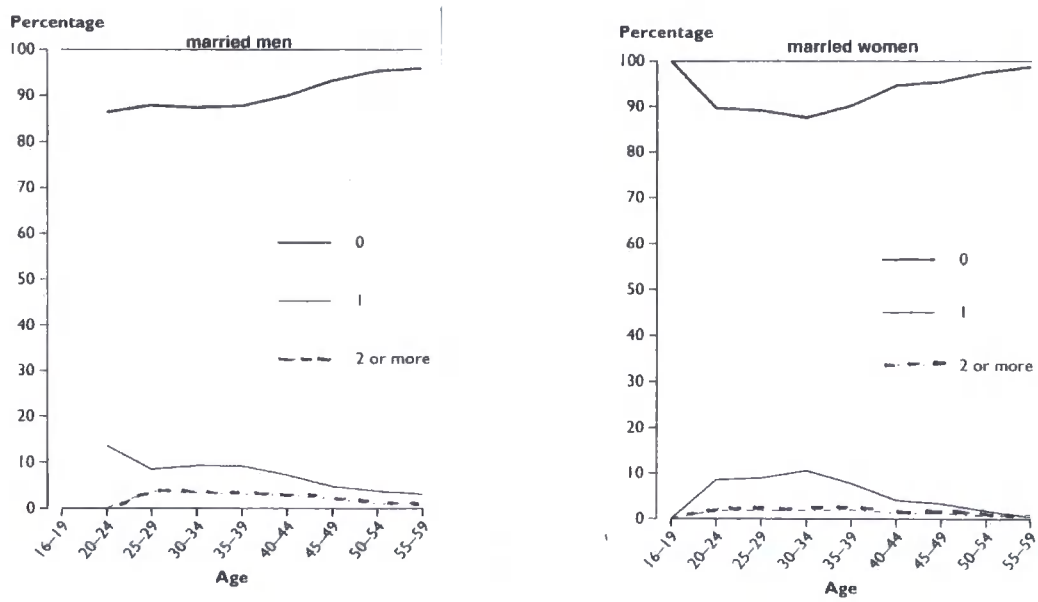


(b) Single Women

Fig. 2.10 Cohabiting Unions Ended without Leading to Marriage

For married men and women, the proportions are more extreme, Fig. 2.11. Of the married population, 85% claimed not to have had a previous cohabiting relationship with someone other than their current spouse and no more than 10% declaring up to

two such previous cohabiting unions. Relatively few in either sample admitted to having had two or more previous such cohabiting relationships :-



(a) Married Men (b) Married Women

Fig. 2.11(a) Cohabiting Unions Ended without leading to Marriage.

These figures suggest there is not a major problem of serial monogamy; only 5% of respondents admit to three or more co-residential relationships, though this does depend on how the question is interpreted. Nevertheless, there are significant numbers who have had up to two previous relationships before their current relationship. These data were for 1998–2000: given the current trend towards later marriage and rising age at first marriage, the proportion having more than one previous marriage-like unions before cohabiting with the person they marry is not likely to decline. Previous relationships could be of five or more years duration, long enough to be regarded as 'long-term'. Health data published for 2005-6 shows that during this period, thirteen percent of men and nine percent of women aged 16-69 had more than one sexual partner, but this says nothing about the duration of any one relationship. However, this makes no distinction between same-sex and heterosexual relationships, and whether these are in or outside of marriage, and is therefore of limited value here.[26]

[26] National Statistics Online, 'Health', http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ (Accessed 1 March 2007).

2.3 Cohabitation and Church Marriage Statistics

The pattern of relationships revealed by statistics gathered nationally and reported above is that it is now rare for couples not to be already living together before getting married and that the median age for single persons marrying is rising. These facts are echoed by such data as are available locally for church marriages: statistics of marriages at a non-conformist church near Harrogate showed that 43 marriages were registered over the period 1990-2002, 26 in 1990-1996 and 17 in 1997-2002. During the first period, slightly more than half of the couples, 15/26, gave separate addresses. Only one marriage involved partners neither of whom were divorcees (though one had been bereaved) and four marriages recorded both partners divorced (until very recently, divorced persons were normally denied remarriage in the Anglican Church unless there were very special circumstances and would often be directed towards the Methodist Church). In the second period, 1997 to 2002, the proportion of partners giving separate addresses fell to an insignificant 2/17. Thus, from what is a very small 'snapshot' sample from one Methodist church comes a graphic illustration of increasing premarital cohabitation rates over a twelve-year period.

The entries in the same register also give some insight into age profiles for the partners. The median age of single, never married men in the first period is 26 years (range 22–42 years), rising to 29 years (range 24–36 years) in the second period. For single never married women, the corresponding ages are for the first period, 26 years (range 23–31 years), rising slightly to 27 years (range 18–35 years) in the second period. These are consistent with the figures quoted in 2.1.

Results for the UK published by ONS show that in 2003, the proportion of marriages celebrated with a religious ceremony was 322 per 1000 compared with 678 per 1000 civil marriages. Of the religious marriages, 224/1000 took place in the Anglican Church, 36/1000 in the Roman Catholic Church with 62/1000 marriages were celebrated through other denominations or religions. There has been a considerable change in numbers over the course of the last thirty years: in 1973, there were 359/1000 and 91/1000 marriages celebrated in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches respectively and 461/1000 civil marriages. Compare these figures with the

period 1841-5 when the civil marriage rate was a mere 23/1000.[27] Similar trends may be found in other Western style economies.[28]

Statistics gathered by the Church of England (including the Church in Wales) reveal the effect of attitudes towards divorce and remarriage. For example, in 1998, the proportion of marriages in Anglican Churches of England and Wales where one or both partners were divorced was 5.1%, compared with 10.1% of all marriages involving a religious ceremony (not exclusively Christian) and 26.7% of all marriages.[29]

The experience of couples living together before marriage extends, surprisingly, to the Church of Ireland (Anglican): in a country traditionally associated with very conservative views, couples presenting for marriage frequently give the same address and the shared mortgage is often their outward sign of commitment.[30]

2.4 Cohabitation as a World Issue

This thesis is concerned primarily with cohabitation in Britain, but some brief comments on practices elsewhere are included, sufficient to show the problem is not unique to this country. What this section does reveal is evidence for a cultural dependence in that cohabitation may conform to different 'rules' according to local custom and tradition as well as the attitude of the local church.

2.4.1 Cohabitation in Western Cultures Outside Britain

The propensity to cohabit varies widely across Europe, for example, in the Scandinavian countries Sweden, Norway and Finland, the percentages of females in

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[27] National Statistics, 'Marriages 1837-2003: Types of Ceremony and Denominations. B. Proportions', http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE (Accessed 29 April 2007).

[28] In Australia, in 1985, 60% of marriages were celebrated in a religious ceremony, whereas by 2005, this had fallen to 40% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Marriages, Australia, 2005', http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/ (Accessed 24 April 2007)). In Canada, the marriage rate has also been declining, with 190,600 marriages recoded in 1989, falling to 157,400 by year 2000. However, about three quarters of all marriages are still celebrated as religious weddings, subject to variations between provinces (Statistics Canada, 'Marriage', http://www40.statcan.ca/ (Accessed 24 April 2007)).

[29] The Archbishops' Council 2000, *Church of England Year Book 2001* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001), Table M: Combinations of Previous Marital Conditions in England and Wales 1998.

[30] Michael Burrows, 'Living in a Whirlwind: Pastoral Care and Matrimonial Practice from an Anglican Perspective', paper delivered at Committed Relationships: Have They a Future? Marriage and its Substitutes in Contemporary Society conference, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2006 (proceedings to be published, 2008).

the age group 20–39 marrying directly and not cohabiting first are 8%, 32% and 21% respectively whereas in Mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain, the corresponding figures are 88% and 85%. For Southern Europe, marriage is clearly the method by which the vast majority enter a co-residential relationship and may be indicative of a combination of the strong influence of the Roman Catholic church in southern Europe plus closer parental control over families, as opposed to the Protestant Northern European countries where attitudes are reputedly more liberal.[31]

Only a small proportion of women in Italy and Spain cohabit before or outside marriage, between 5% and 9%. For the Scandinavian countries, the percentages cohabiting before marriage range from 31% to 46%, the percentages cohabiting outside marriage from 33% to 57%. The UK and other Western European countries fall in between these figures, an exception being Switzerland where 48% of women enter their first union through cohabitation.[32]

Median values for the duration of cohabitation: life-table based estimates for the duration of all cohabitation suggest figures of 51 months in Sweden, 44 months in France and 25 and 33 months in Italy and Spain respectively.[33] The figure for Sweden is comparable to the figure for pre-marital cohabitation, 48 months, whereas the other countries quoted show pre-marital cohabitation not markedly different to Great Britain, of the order of 25 months.

Outside of Europe, Canada presents some interesting statistics. In a country where many provinces recognise common-law marriage, the proportion of married-couple

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[31] Kiernan, 'Cohabitation', 29. It must not be assumed that the influence of the Roman Catholic Church is universal: Anthony Harvey in a lecture to Ripon Diocesan FLAME group, 1997, relates that in a staunchly Roman Catholic part of Bavaria, local custom decreed that a girl may not marry until she had proved her fertility: the only sure test was to become pregnant, so it was considered normal for brides to be expectant on their wedding day. This does not imply they needed to cohabit, but indicates that local culture may over-ride traditional strict church teaching. This is also found in some African cultures (Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church. Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1996), 139-41).

[32] A random visit to the Harrogate Register Office in June 2005, found that out of 57 couples whose banns were posted, only 11 gave separate addresses. Those claiming to be living apart fell into two main groups: commonly, one partner was in the army, forced to live in single accommodation, others lived outside the area, therefore living apart by force of circumstance. This does not preclude them already having a sexual relationship. These figures make no distinction between first marriages and remarriages, but serve to support statements on changing social attitudes.

[33] Kiernan, 'Cohabitation', 29.

families has fallen from 83% in 1981 to 70% in 2001. Over the same period, the proportion of common-law families has increased from 6% to 14%.[34]

2.4.2 Cohabitation in Non-Western Cultures

In this section, a number of marital practices from other cultures that blur the distinction between cohabitation and marriage are highlighted. Many of these arise through local practicalities, often to ensure tribal and cultural survival. In communities in East and West Africa, for example, it is considered important to have children before marriage; consequently, many couples live together, bringing up a child or children before they decide to fulfil their expectation of marriage.[35]

In countries far removed from Western culture, other forms of relationship are found. In the Seychelles, for example, marriage has, over the last twenty years, apparently gone into terminal decline, predicted to disappear within about fifteen years, as it is replaced by a system called 'living en ménage'.[36] It is the man who usually initiates the 'en ménage', first finding accommodation then inviting the girl to live with him. The woman has legal rights automatically conferred after five years of living together, when they are regarded as effectively married, with or without a wedding. Government statistics for the Seychelles now make no distinction between marriage and 'en ménage'. This practice may blur the distinction between cohabitation and marriage: if there is no intention to 'marry', it is not clear how the system treats a relationship entered with no long-term intent or expectation.

In the UK, economic factors are often invoked as a reason for cohabiting: in poorer countries, these may be more acute but for different reasons. In Uganda, boys and girls cohabit before they get married because families are inevitably too poor to afford the requisite dowry and wedding gown. The government there is encouraging a

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[34] Statistics Canada, 'Marriage', http://www40.statcan.ca/ (Accessed 24 April 2007).

[35] Njongankulu Ndungane, 'Called to Full Humanity', Briefing Paper for Lambeth Conference, *Church Times*, 8 May 1998, paras. 53, 57(a).

Significantly, a similar practice was found in Roman Catholic Bavaria in the 1970s, where a prospective bride was required to demonstrate her fertility by becoming pregnant (A E Harvey, lecture to FLAME group, Leeds, 1977, recording supplied by John Oliver, former Archdeacon of Leeds).

[36] French K. Chang-Him, 'Marriage and Cohabitation in the Seychelles', *International Anglican Family Network (IAFN) Newsletter*, (Wells:, One Plus One, October 1994), 3.

change in culture that gifts should not exceed what the families can afford to try to avoid couples cohabiting instead of getting married.[37]

Closely related to cohabitation and multiple relationships is polygamy that, from earliest times, has been a feature of marriage in many non-Western cultures, particularly in the Middle East and Africa where the numbers of wives and concubines conspire to demonstrate wealth and status.[38] In Thai society, bigamous cohabitation is becoming an accepted practice. A husband may have a 'minor wife', usually younger than his first wife but not married to him and whereas the first wife

> carries the family name, bears the family heirs, commands the family fortune, and accompanies the husband on all official activities, the second is treated as a concubine. The first wife may even help her husband find his second wife in order that . . .the more tedious part of wifely duties can be borne by someone else.[39]

In some of the more remote villages of Nepal, fraternal polyandry is found, where several brothers share one wife.[40] All contribute to supporting the family, either through economic support (mainly farming) or looking after the home and family. The claim is that this system gives the wife security in an otherwise economically impoverished environment. Each brother has his own room in the house and the wife will choose with whom and when to have sex: this effectively controls family size, and leads to fewer children overall than would be in a monogamous culture. Although the brothers are all 'married' to the one wife, they do have some freedom to leave: an example quoted is of a family of one wife married to five brothers, four of whom have left, two to find work elsewhere and two to study in Kathmandu with no guarantee they would return. As family sizes are getting smaller, the practice of fraternal polyandry is thought to be in decline, exacerbated by exposure to romantic 'Bollywood' movies changing young people's cultural aspirations.

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[37] S. Masereka, 'Uganda', *IAFN Newsletter* (Wells: One Plus One: October, 1994), 2.
[38] The late King Fahed of Saudi Arabia is reputed to have had 275 wives – presumably all legally married to the King and therefore not concubines or mistresses: the sons of 10 of them were described as fulfilling vital roles in the rule and government of the country.
[39] M. Morris, 'Cohabitation in the Land of Smiles', *IAFN Newsletter* (Wells: One Plus One, October 1994), 4.
[40] BBC Radio 4, 'From Our Own Correspondent', 7 January 2006.

Although some of these practices seem alien and remote to us, they all involve close relationships between men and women and find certain resonances in contemporary Britain.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

The general comments on cohabitation from Chapter 1 have been quantified using sociological statistics. These confirm and support the anecdotal evidence that cohabitation, with or without and expectation of marriage, is now widely practised in contemporary Britain. Secondly, for both men and women, age at first marriage is increasing: a consequence of this is that couples coming for marriage are almost certainly in a marriage-like relationship. Thirdly, it is also evident that a significant proportion of couples coming for marriage may have been in more than one marriage-like cohabiting relationship (with different partners), some having had three (or more) prior serious relationships, all of which have broken down. It is clear from statistics for births to non-married women that many children are being born to cohabitating couples, though it is not possible to ascertain how this affects the stability of a relationship.

Overall, the analysis presented here confirms cohabitation to be both widespread and normative within society as a whole and pre-marital cohabitation a feature of church as well as civil marriage. Thus, the growth of informal marriage-like relationships presents a direct challenge to orthodox Christians of all denominations and clergy, in particular, need to consider their attitude towards couples living together as though already married. In general, the church does not at the present time have a unified or consistent response but this should not prevent it from commenting on and attempting to influence attitudes and to foster long-term, stable relationships.

Chapter 3

Marriage Within the Christian Tradition

The general statements made in Chapter 1, supported, and quantified by published statistical data discussed in Chapter 2 confirm that in contemporary Britain, cohabitation has become established as a lifestyle. The orthodox teaching of the church is that all sexual relationships should be contained within marriage: cohabitation, by its very nature, lies outside this teaching and remains peripheral to the Christian tradition of marriage. One of the declared aims of this thesis is to show how the Christian marriage tradition may be developed to be more sympathetic towards cohabitation to help the church become more accommodating towards couples living together in committed relationships. In a predominantly Christian country, the Christian marriage tradition provides the criteria to which other relationships may be compared. In this chapter, I explore how the Christian ethics of marriage are given authority through biblical interpretation leading to our contemporary understanding of marriage.

It is axiomatic that a theology of Christian marriage should be Christ centred through the handed down canon of scripture.[1] The task in hand is to discern Christ's actual

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[1] Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, 22.

The Bible forms a canon of literature spanning more than a millennium of early Judaic history, though extended through its reiteration of much older oral traditions of indeterminate age. As a written text, it is discontinuous, being the work of many authors, some identified explicitly, others by tradition or repute. Through its discontinuous and plural nature, it can often appear to be in contradiction with itself.

Within the Christian tradition, the canon established by Jerome in his Latin translation from the Hebrew and Greek included the books of the Old and New Testaments as well as the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha denotes books found in the earlier Greek (Christian) Bibles such as the Septuagint but not included in the Jewish canon. Other contemporary books have been regarded differently, for example, the books of the Pseudepigrapha. Doubts over the authority or authenticity of these books contributed to their exclusion from the canon by the Christian Church Fathers (though 1 Enoch and Jubilees form part of the canon of the Ethiopian church) (see Michael A. Knibb, 'Pseudepigrapha', in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Holden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM, 1990), 564-8).

Taken in its entirety, the Bible does three things that are significant here. Firstly, it provides a history of the domestic, social, religious, and political life of the Israelites from about 1200 BCE to 100 CE. Secondly, it provides a revelation of God's purpose for humankind, as shown through the lives of ordinary men and women. Thirdly, in the context of sexual relationships, it provides a set of household codes that enabled society to order itself from the family upwards.

The ancient world-view of relationships between men and women regarded men as active partners, women passive. This leads to an acceptance of hierarchy, patriarchy, polygamy, even slavery within marriage, attitudes that are resisted in our present moral climate. The continuous interpretation

teaching on marriage, allowing the ethics for Christian marriage to emerge: this comes through his criticism of the way the Israelite culture permitted divorce.[2]

3.1 Marriage and Christian Ethics

Marriage as such featured little in Jesus' ministry.[3] Jesus taught against a background of domestic marriage circumscribed by the (Mosaic) Law: his avowed intention according to Matthew was not to destroy the Law, but to fulfil the Law through his teaching.[4] In Mark, Jesus is asked the question whether divorce itself is lawful: to this, Jesus refers them to the Mosaic Law that permitted divorce, but that it was out of human failing. That being so, there should be no dispute and it is much more likely that contemporary debate centred on the grounds for divorce.[5] Matthew focuses whether it is lawful to divorce *for any cause,* opening up a debate between the Hillel school that permits a husband to divorce his wife for even quite trivial reasons, and the Shammai school that restricts divorce to sexual acts committed outside of marriage in contravention of the purity codes (Lev 18:1-20).[6]

Jesus' immediate reply to the Pharisees was to remind them of their Scripture, of what was said 'in the beginning', quoting two verses from the creation narratives, Gen 1:27

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of the canon to meet the needs of a changing culture is essentially a history of the Christian church. It is against this background that a Christ centred hermeneutic for marriage is developed as described in 1.5.2.

The Christian movement started as a small Jewish sect of Jesus followers and as such, shared the Hebrew Scriptures and the Judaic Law. Its expansion into a church, firstly within the Jewish community and then throughout the gentile world, required it to assert its own unique identity, based on the teaching of Jesus. Marriage, with its specifically Christian ethic of love, formed part of this distinctiveness.

The development of the Christian marriage tradition has been a continuous process of reinterpretation, as Christianity has had to resist the challenges of other belief systems and enculturation through conversions of non-Christians.

[2] In the Gospels, the accounts in Mt 19:1-12 and Mk 10:1-12 follow closely, as do those of Mt 5:32 and Lk 16:18. The conclusion is usually drawn that these authors have taken these passages from common literary sources and that the words are in all probability, close to those of Jesus (David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2002), 171-5).

[3] There is the wedding at Cana in Jn 2:1-11 as well as the parable of the wedding banquet, Mt 22:2-14 but these passages are calls to recognise and accept the new teaching of Jesus. Other references to weddings occur in Mt 25:10 (parable of the ten bridesmaids), Lk 12:36 (parable of the watchful slaves) and 14:8 where Jesus talks of the need for humility.

[4] Mt 5:17-48.

[5] There is an argument that more rigid attitudes to divorce were already developing within Judaism, implied partly through Mal 2:13-16, and that this supports the case for Mark's text being original (Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: Black, 1995), 235).

[6] Supporting evidence for the Shammai view from Mal 2:13-16 is cited by Hooker, *Mark*, 235.

and Gen 2:24.[7] He reasserted that humankind was created both male and female, as an act of God, and with a place and purpose in relation to God (Gen 1:27).[8] Jesus then went on to declare that henceforth, God requires us to live according to his new covenant of love rather than mere regulations.[9] In order to expand this into the Christian norms for marriage, it is necessary to consider Jesus' teaching in some detail.

3.1.1 Jesus and Male-Female Relatedness

The creation of man and woman individually shares a commonality with other ancient creation narratives. However, few, if any, make the same assertion as in Genesis that this dialogical form of male-female relatedness is normative. The division of the sexes is integral to humankind finding fulfilment as heterosexual pairs and existing in community.[10]

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[7] Setting two Scriptures, Gen 1:27 and 2:24 against one another by Jesus is unusual, if not unique (Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20,* World Biblical Commentary 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 80).

[8] Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1994); Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28,* Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1993); Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: A & C Black, 1991).

[9] David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Athlone, 1956), 72; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 387; Hooker, *Mark*, 235.

The authority of the Bible and the authenticity of Jesus' teaching may appear to be undermined by apparently later New Testament writers reverting to the traditional Jewish household code such as in 1 Tim 2:11-14, Col 3:18 and 1 Pet 3:1 that require wives to be always submissive to their husbands. This is diametrically opposed to the new ethic of Jesus that was sympathetic towards women: the resolution lies in their historical context, for example, when the passage in 1 Pet 3 is linked to chapter 2, the meaning of the epistle becomes clear as a defence of the gospel and the need to remain an effective witness to God. Though other Biblical texts may be found to give men power and authority over women, the manner by which Jesus invokes creation is to create equality between the sexes (see Barton, *The Family*, 8-9).

The whole history of humankind has tended to be male dominated. Matriarchal societies have existed in the past and conform to two types. In very primitive societies such as in the New Hebrides, it is the custom for young males to be separated off from the tribe or group to be trained as hunters *and* warriors. At the same time, they are required to show deference to forbidden females. It is to prevent incest with their mother or sister. The other group is where a dynasty needs to protect its succession and inheritance, for example, in ancient Egypt, where the matriarch would be married to both a brother and a consort. It is not clear whether sexual intercourse extended to the brother-sister relationship. Remnants of matriarchal practices survive in some Bantu tribes in former Uganda where the tribe leader is elevated as the 'Queen-sister', in contrast to the inferior position occupied by most women in Africa (Evelyn Reed, *Woman's Evolution from Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family* (New York: Pathfinder, 1974), 82, 440-1).

[10] Similar motifs are found elsewhere in the Old Testament, for example, Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1, 19:13. The creation narratives in Genesis are considered unique amongst the creation myths of the Near East: God is accorded a uniqueness and sovereignty, giving an authority to creation not found in other polytheistic myths (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Bible Commentary vol. 1 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 54). Also, Hebrew culture, though patriarchal, did recognise the importance of women in the continued existence of humankind (Claus Westermann, *Genesis vol. I: 1-11*, trans. J. J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 232).

In the context of marriage-like relationships, man and woman should exist in a complete and harmonious communion with each other.[11] Karl Barth, argues that 'male and female' are, to God, the one *adam* because they are one before Him (Barth was attempting to resolve the later arguments of the Church Fathers who sought to distinguish between 'image' and 'likeness'): being made in the image of God is the essence of being human.[12] The image of God should be seen through the perspective of Jesus Christ and that our understanding of what it means to be human starts with Jesus Christ. David Wilkinson argues that

> Image is about both creation and redemption. Our capacity for relationship with God means that we reflect something of God in our human bodies.

Thus, a contemporary understanding of creation of humankind, leads us to find fulfilment through relationship, community, and responsibility.[13]

Firstly, it is through relationship, and in particular, relationship with God that we find purpose in life: relationship is fundamental to the creating of community in which we find our humanity'.[14] Secondly, the image of God 'is not possessed by an isolated individual but is possessed by individuals in community': humankind can only exhibit its likeness to God through living in community.[15] The manner of our creation and relationship with God as expressed through Gen 1:27 and reiterated by Jesus should not support the cultural suppression of women but give equality to both male and female in community and in all heterosexual relationships.[16]

Thirdly humankind is given sovereignty over the natural world, and is expected to exercise responsible stewardship over the rest of creation, Gen 1:26-9. If the human-

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The Greek text of the Septuagint is interesting in itself. It re-emphasises the message of creation that humankind is created not as two separate beings, one dominated by the other, but as a complementary pair in a bond of unity.

[11] In ancient Judaic culture, non-heterosexual relationships were forbidden. Many Christians (and others) now challenge the creation of a heterosexual pair as the sole normative relationship (see, for example, Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 36-7).

[12] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III*, 1, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), 195.

[13] David Wilkinson, *The Message of Creation. Encountering the Lord of the Universe* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2002), 37-8.

[14] Wilkinson, *Creation*, 39.

[15] J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: Harper & Row, 1985), 222-3.

[16] Wilkinson, *Creation*, 40.

nature relationship is exercised without stewardship, domination and exploitation follows.[17] When humankind exercises dominion over the whole of Creation, this is not through authority but responsibility.[18]

The opening statement of Jesus' response, quoting Gen 1:27, gives us an insight into how human relationships should reflect the intention of creation. This says little about marriage per se, but lays the foundation for how Jesus describes the formation of the marriage bond.

3.1.2 Jesus and the Marriage Bond

Jesus quotes Gen 2:24: when Matthew interjects 'And he said' (Mt 19:5), it is to be understood that this is the word of Jesus, not the Creator.[19]

Within ancient Judaic culture, marriage had several functions.[20] In Mt 19:5-6 and Mk 10:7-8, Jesus uses this same verse to emphasise the three stages in the formation of a marriage, the man leaving his parents, forming a union with his wife, the two becoming one.[21] The formation of marriage requires the man to break his existing family ties in order to form new relationships with his wife: his mother, father, brother and sister all share a common stem, but as man and wife they integrate their two families.[22] A man who leaves his father and mother severs his covenant with them

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[17] Wilkinson, *Creation*, 42-3.
[18] Westermann *Genesis*, 53.
[19] Gundry, *Matthew*, 378.
There has been considerable debate as to whether Gen 2:24 is was part of the original Genesis narrative or is aetiological, a verse to explain the foregoing passage of scripture, putting it into a context that could be understood. Changes in literary style suggest the latter (Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (London: SCM, 1961), 82). Westermann concurs that Gen 2:24 forms a short epilogue, essential to the understanding of whole of the creation narrative (Westermann, *Genesis*, 234, 253). An alternative interpretation is that the second Creation narrative ends at vs. 23 and that vs. 24 is the opening verse of the subsequent episode, in order that Adam and Eve may be presented in the Garden of Eden as married (D. Rudman, 'Falling for the Wrong Woman? A Theological Reassessment of Genesis 2-3', *The Expository Times* 113 (2001), 39-43). Further comment on the meaning of Gen 2:24 is reserved for Chapter 5.
[20] Naomi Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 6, 39.
Primarily marriage allowed family dynasties to prosper and flourish in an orderly fashion: in their harsh economic climate, it enabled families to survive. The importance attached to family, and in turn the incorporation into society through marriage is evident through the emphasis of genealogies in the Pentateuch that related who was related to whom.
[21] France, *Mark*, 392; Evans, *Mark*, 84. Discrepancies in the 'original' Greek texts that were translated into the Septuagint are attributed to the scribes' tendency to miss out non-essential text (Gundry, *Matthew*, 378; Hooker, *Mark*, 236).
[22] Westermann, *Genesis*, 233.

(Gen 2:24) and when he unites with his wife, creates a new covenant.[23] The Hebrew term for covenant appears to have a root signifying a bond or fetter, pointing to a binding relationship[24]. The whole nature of his relationship to his parents and other siblings is forever altered and the man's priorities and obligations to his parents are transferred to his wife.[25] Jesus' teaching is that that the institution of marriage should emulate God's intention for humankind as declared in creation. As a statement of Christian belief, Gen 2:24, has become forever embedded in the marriage tradition.[26]

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[23] Theodore Mackin, S. J., *What is Marriage?* (New York: Paulist, 1982), 28.

[24] G. Johannes Botterwick and Helmer Ringren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 2 vols, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), ad loc.

[25] The language of Genesis reinforces the meaning of Gen 2:24 as used by Jesus. The Hebrew *azab* in the Genesis version means to 'loosen' in the sense of relinquishing his dependence on his parents. It occurs fifty-one times in the Old Testament and is invariably translated as 'abandon' or 'leave' in the sense of a physical moving on though not necessarily implying the severing of one's relationships (Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Edinburgh: Young, 1900), ad loc.). A stronger interpretation is that the man forsakes his parents, severing relationships with his family to form a distinct new relationship (though in a relative rather than absolute sense. In today's terms, leaving implies setting up home elsewhere). The translation to 'forsake' is a strong reminder that the focus of man's obligations and responsibilities has completely changed (Wenham, *Genesis*, 70-71).
The man and woman 'cling fast' (NRSV), describing a union that is perceived to be permanent: the Hebrew *davaq* is used thirty-two times in the Old Testament, either on its own or in association with other words, having the meaning to cling or hold fast as in *hold fast to the Lord your God* (Dt 11:22). In all but one instance, the interpretation is for a joining together to make a permanent bond. A striking example is in 2 Sam 23:10: 'David . . . . struck down the Philistines until his arm grew weary, though his hand clung to the sword': the imperative in battle was to hold on to one's sword at all costs. Though *davaq* is commonly used to describe physical situations, it implies permanence in the context of the relationship a man forms with his wife, one that should not voluntarily be severed. The relationship need not be without an emotional dimension: in Gen 34:3, for example, 'Schechem's soul stuck to Dinah', implying passion as well as permanence. The original 'cleave' conveys an image of the man and woman binding themselves together through marriage vows witnessed by God, an interpretation supported by Mal 2:14, 'the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth . . . she is your companion and your wife by covenant'.

Finally, the couple become 'one flesh' (the Living Bible uses the phrase 'one person' and the New American Bible 'one body'). This comes form the Hebrew *basar* (flesh) and *echad* (one). The Hebrew *echad* means more than just a person in the singular, but conveys the idea of the man and women united through their relationship. There are two hundred and forty-four examples of the use of *basar* in the Old Testament, including seventeen in Genesis and sixteen in Exodus (Young, *Concordance,* ad loc.). Almost invariably, it carries the connotation of physical flesh, usually in the context of animals but extended to embrace the human body. This gives rise to the tradition of consummation without which a marriage could be declared null and void.

Although the expression for 'one flesh' is used to convey the image of a single body, the Hebrew '*basar*' can sometimes take on overtly male meaning. '*Basar*' occurs in Gen 17:11, 13-4, 23 as a euphemism for the male genital organ: in Judaism, the circumcised penis is symbolic of the special link between YHWH and the male members of a community where procreation is the prerogative of the male. If '*basar*' as used in the 'one flesh' relationship is given a similar interpretation, then the bond becomes one that is male dominated. This accords with the overall patriarchal theme of Genesis (Ilona N. Rashkov, *Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapollis: Fortune, 2000), 77).

[26] Though not invoked by Jesus, the marriage 'process' may be considered to start in Gen 2:22 when the woman is brought to the man for approval: this introduces a primary motif, that of finding a compatible companion (this will be discussed further in Chapter 5) (Wenham, *Genesis*, 69–70). There is a hint of arranged marriage here, through God bringing the woman to the man: this and the very act of man naming the woman could be taken to imply the subordination of a woman's role in marriage.

Jesus added the rider to his teaching on marriage, 'what God has joined together, let no one separate' (NRSV) (also translated as 'let no man put asunder' (KJV)). This means that the marital bond, once formed, cannot be broken through human agency and is a command that a couple keep their marriage vows throughout their lifetime. If God has indeed joined them together, then to sever their marriage bond by breaking the vows is considered a sin against God and against humankind, destroying the order of Creation. The interpretation of 'man' in the KJV is not to lawyers or outsiders, but to the husband who alone at that time had the power to initiate divorce. Hooker interprets the Greek 'divide', 'separate', 'put asunder' as referring specifically to divorce.[27] The teaching is summed up as follows:

> the marriage ethics of the kingdom of God must be based not on a concession to human failure, but on the pattern set out by God's original creation of man and woman. What God has joined together must not be separated by *human* initiative.[28]

The Torah was clear that there should be no adultery (Exod 20:14, Dt 5:18), yet it was always within the power of a man to divorce his wife (Dt 24:1-5): a marriage damaged through adultery could not continue. Mark's gospel is unequivocal. He is saying that marriage is lifted from being a 'contract of mutual convenience' to a relationship that cannot be separated. Through marriage, a couple are no longer 'two independent beings who may choose to go their own way, but a single indivisible unit'. By recognising Gen 2:24 as the authoritative basis for marriage, according to Mark, Jesus sees no need to qualify his response: marriage is for life.[29]

Matthew, in contrast to Mark, accepted that divorce was permitted according to Mosaic Law, but that it was contrary to creation and a concession because of people's 'hardness of hearts', that is, human failure. Jesus' teaching on permanence and indissolubility of marriage appears to be undermined by the qualification 'except for porneia' or 'unchastity'.[30] Furthermore, Luke's Gospel states that any remarriage after

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[27] Hooker, *Mark*, 236; Evans, Mark, 84; Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 141.
[28] France, *Mark*, 388.
[29] France, *Mark*, 392.
[30] Mt 5:32. There is a view that since this ordinance does not occur in Mark or Luke, it may be interpreted as an editorial insertion from Matthew to bring Jesus' words into line with Jewish practice (Gundry, *Matthew*, 381). Modern scholarship recognises that Mat 19:1-12 in fact comprises two separate logia on Christ's part, merged into a single passage: vs. 1-8 alone were directed towards the Pharisees and the second logion in which the Matthean exception appears anticipates Acts 15:20, 29

divorce whilst the former partner is living is adulterous. The important point made by Jesus was to show how misconduct damages a relationship. A *de facto* separation did not alter the divine intention for marriage. Adultery causes disruption of the marriage bond; divorce is the sorting out of a marriage that has already been destroyed.[31]

3.1.3 Jesus and the Ethics of Marriage

From the Gospel texts some clear norms for Christian marriage emerge that would give it a distinctive identity and separate it from the practices of the surrounding Judaic and other cultures.[32] Although divorce would still be tolerated, Jesus himself acknowledged that adultery could destroy a marriage and make divorce inevitable. The new ethical code was aimed at making the marriage bond more secure and embodies three fundamental principles of monogamy, faithfulness and permanence.[33]

(a) Monogamy

As well as being an explanation for the way in which men and women interact so as to fulfil God's plan for humankind, Gen 2:24 is reinforcing the message of Gen 1:27 that marriage is a paradigm of 'man' and 'woman' created as a male-female pair. The ethic for monogamous marriage is reinforced through Gen 1:27 which, coupled with Gen 7:9 where the animals entered the ark in pairs, formed part of a 'standard proof'

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and Acts 21:25. There, it appears to be directed specifically towards Jewish converts to Christianity, typically the Palestinian and Syrian Jews who attempted to follow their old Jewish customs. It urges them to refrain from any sort of unchastity. A similar situation arose with gentile converts who adhered to their Greco-Roman laws of marriage that admitted what would normally be regarded as incestuous relationships and other irregularities (Edward Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), 148).

The interpretation by the Jewish community on what actually constituted 'porneia', from the original Hebrew '*ereweth dabhar*', meaning 'nakedness of a thing' or 'some uncleanliness', has been the subject of considerable debate. One interpretation favoured by Catholic scholars, is that porneia refers not so much to sexual immorality as such but to incestuous or illicit marriage from an interpretation of the Hebrew *na'af*, meaning some irregularity (Lev 18:6-18) (David Atkinson, *To Have and to Hold: The Marriage Covenant and Discipline of Divorce* (London: Collins, 1979), 102). However, according to Jewish laws, an illicit marriage would automatically be null and void and the need for a divorce would be unnecessary (Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 124).

[31] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 148-50.

[32] Although Judaic marriage was ideally and invariably monogamous, this was not always so and is an area where cultural practice overlapped with other cultures. Any reading of the Old Testament confirms that polygamy occurred, often associated with kingship where numbers of wives and concubines conferred authority on a ruler (see, for example, 2 Ch 11:21; SS. 6:8; 1Kg. 11:3).

[33] Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 178.

for monogamy in the so-called Damascus Document.[34] These verses confirm a commonality between humankind and the rest of the animal kingdom, that through nature, we are intended to come together in monogamous relationships, blessed by God, Gen 1:28.

(b) Faithfulness

Faithfulness means honouring one's commitment to one's spouse to the exclusion of all others. Jesus' teaching on faithfulness centres round the causes and consequences of adultery and concern for the disruption of marriage.[35]

(c) Permanence

Permanence enhances the quality of the relationship expected of true believers, contradicting the ancient Judaic attitude to marriage that made no assumption for a lifelong relationship.[36] This imperative for permanence was not a command that they could not separate, only that they should not. In the first instance, the couple bind themselves together through their vows: Malachi portrays God as a witness to the couple binding themselves together, urging them to be faithful, and is angry when the vows are broken (Mal 2:14-6). There is a distinction between God 'joining' the couple together and the couple 'binding' themselves: the imperative 'let no one separate' (Mt 19:6, Mk 10:9) may be interpreted as 'no other person can separate'. Although Jesus has admitted that marriages do sometimes end in divorce, the implication is that if they have been joined together by God, it is sinful to break their marriage bond by breaking their vows.[37]

To these, Jesus added two further ethics that circumscribe marriage, firstly, that marriage is no longer considered compulsory and secondly, responsibility for family.

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[34] The Damascus document is a commentary of Judaic practices first discovered in the Cairo Geniza, and in later fragments at Qumran, referred to as CD, representing Cairo:Damascus, cited in Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 137-8.
[35] Gundry, *Matthew*, 89.
[36] Hagner, *Matthew*, 548.
[37] Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 141.

(d) Marriage no longer compulsory

One of the dilemmas for early Christians was the acceptability of adult singleness leading to celibacy: Jesus taught that it was acceptable for any man to remain single 'for the sake of the kingdom of heaven' (Mt 19:10-12). For Jews in the first century, the notion of a person remaining single would be profoundly disturbing and perceived to be a threat to the very existence and continuation of humankind. This is emphasised by the fact there is no Hebrew word for bachelor, no contemplation of a man remaining single.[38] A good marriage in Judaism was measured in terms of children and a Hebrew marriage without children was regarded as lacking.[39] The argument is resolved by recognising that God requires humankind to be procreative as a whole and not individually (God's command could always be fulfilled through adoption: fulfilment within a marriage does not necessitate having children of one's own, particularly where natural conception is not possible).[40] This contrasts with the rabbinic and other Jewish teaching that marriage was regarded a necessity: Jesus was saying that a life without marriage was permissible in the eyes of God, removing any sense of any guilt felt by a person not able to marry.[41]

When Jesus says 'Let anyone accept this who can', he is justifying what for the Jews was an exception to the normal pattern of society. However, Jesus is not advocating remaining single as it is normally understood today, but that a person choosing singleness should remain celibate, working for the furtherance of the Kingdom without the distraction and responsibility of family life. It is in this sense that remaining single is a particular gift from God.

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[38] Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 170-171.

[39] This led to debate over the number of children needed to reach fulfilment; the Hillelites won the argument over the Shammaites, saying that a male and female were needed, invoking the example of God, rather than only two children, according to Moses (Exod 18:2-3) (Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 139).

[40] Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 182.

According to custom, in a childless marriage, it was always assumed that the woman was infertile, thus, her barrenness constituted grounds for divorce. Retention of her *ketubah* gave the husband some incentive to seek a fertile wife elsewhere.

[41] Westermann, *Genesis*, 160: it is interesting that there is no evidence from the scriptures that Jesus' assumed singleness was questioned. A further consideration is whether Jesus' birth could be regarded as illegitimate. There is no evidence that witnesses were prepared to have him declared a *manzer*. The large dowry needed to secure a wife was probably not forthcoming from a humble family (Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 169).

(e) Responsibility for family

I have argued above that Jesus used creation to show how humankind was created in community and that a man and woman are fully human only when they interact with each other in a unique, monogamous partnership. This generates a social structure that provides for orderly procreation and the continuity of society.[42] A person's blood relatives are their 'flesh and bone': marriage creates kinship ties between a man and his wife. The union created relates the man and wife as brother and sister, that is, the wife becomes a sister to her husband's brother, daughter to her father-in-law and so on. Kinship relationships are given absolute permanence through marriage, and once created, are not terminated by death.[43]

The reality in ancient Judaic times was that there was always likely to be a surplus of widows: men had lower life expectancy due to accidents or fighting in battle. Unless already well provided for, the custom was for widows to be absorbed into their deceased husband's family to avoid being exposed to living alone. However, one of the direct consequences of Jesus' teaching was that a divorced woman could, if she had the financial resources, remain single.[44]

3.1.4 Jesus and the Church Family

The ancient Israelite focus was on the biological family: man and woman joined and that they should be fruitful and multiply. This ensured the continuance of the Jewish race; thus, it was through their children that they sought God's blessing on their marriage, indeed, their route to salvation. Jesus brought about a far-reaching change that was to subordinate the biological family to the newly emerging Christian community, the church family. This faith community now becomes the 'first family of God', within which the biological family is embedded as a witness to God's love. It is this family of God that becomes the primary vehicle for grace and salvation.[45] This new community displays a distinctive social ethic for healing, care and feeding the

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[42] Westermann, *Genesis*, 160.
[43] Wenham, *Genesis*, 71.
[44] Instone-Brewer, *Divorce*, 29.
[45] Stephen C. Barton, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and the Family', in Barton (ed.) *The Family*, 26.

poor and sick, and challenge of injustice.[46] It follows that within the church family, one might remain unmarried without losing one's place in community.

Through His teaching, Jesus anticipates modern concerns for equality and sexual justice for men and women alike, as well as a role for forgiveness and reconciliation.[47] Christ preached the forgiveness of sin in many situations, not least involving personal relationships. Through grace, God's forgiveness and rescue from sin is available to all; though marriage is a universal gift from God it does not automatically confer forgiveness of sin. Instead, forgiveness must be brought into the marriage. The new ethics for marriage taught by Jesus contributed to codes of conduct that separated the 'Jesus movement' from ancient Judaism, giving it its distinct identity. As the movement spread into the Greco-Roman world, it faced different cultural practices and the need to develop and refine its identity continued.

3.2 Marriage in the Early Church

The embryonic New Testament churches such as those at Corinth and Ephesus through to the Apostolic Fathers continued to create a distinctive Christian identity for the new faith communities as they spread through the gentile world. Much of the impetus driving their deliberations came from diverse challenges to the orthodox Christian interpretation of scripture. Firstly, there were converts to Christianity who continued to marry according to their Jewish or Greco-Roman laws of marriage, bringing them into conflict with the new Christian ethics. Secondly, there was an infiltration of Gnostic, Pelagic and Manichean teaching that challenged the developing Christian orthodoxy. A common problem that all these movements (including Christianity) had to resolve was to reconcile good and evil in the world and part of this hinged on the goodness or otherwise of marriage and sexual intercourse.[48]

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[46] Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1993), 75-76.
[47] Thatcher, *Liberating Sex,* 86.
[48] Gnosticism antedated Christianity: its followers regarded themselves as the true interpreters of Jesus' teaching. They preached a dualistic view of the world, that there were two gods, Yahweh of the Old Testament, a creator god but the source of evil. Hence Old Testament teaching was rejected. A core belief was that humankind could not assume free will but was governed through predestination. This gave rise to the resolution of humankind into three groups: *Hylics,* who comprised the majority of humankind, were predestined to damnation and considered unredeemable. In contrast, the *Pneumatics* were considered to be true Gnostics, predestined to salvation. In between were the *Psychics* whose souls were evil but could be saved by living according to pneumatic ways. The *pneumatics* took diverging attitudes to matters sexual: some would take an ascetic view of marriage and avoid all sexual activity. Others indulged in a licentious lifestyle, referred to as antinomianism, since they were saved anyway!

3.2.1 Paul and Marriage

The new Christian community in Greece was still influenced by eschatology: the preservation of the human race was not necessarily a priority since Christ's return was still regarded as imminent and part of Paul's mission was to create a community free from sin.[49] In marrying, a man was expected to leave the freedom of his bachelor life to new assume responsibilities for the care and maintenance of his wife and the upbringing and education of their children.[50] Families could be limited through abortion (dangerous), exposure or infanticide (risky), or contraception (unreliable) and invoked general disapproval.[51] The intellectual debate was whether marriage was a proper role for an intelligent, informed, and morally upright citizen.[52] The emerging Christian movement in the gentile, Greek-speaking world was confronted by the ongoing clash of the two cultural groups, Stoics and Cynics, who held differing views on marriage.[53]

The prophet Mani, a Parthian born in Babylonia circa 216 CE and founder of the Manichees, was looked upon by his followers as the ultimate prophet in the line of Jesus. The Manichees also preached a dualistic doctrine of good against evil, light against darkness, spirit against matter. The dark and evil realities included sexuality and therefore marriage and sexual intercourse were to be avoided. In reality, they effected a compromise: the 'electi' or 'perfect' Mainicheans abstained totally, but the 'auditores' only on Sundays.

The Pelagians, founded by Pelagius in Rome in 380 CE and his disciple, Julian, Bishop of Eclanum, argued that the Fall left human nature unaffected whereas Augustine believed that it was so impaired by original sin that grace was needed to remedy our sinfulness. Hence sexual intercourse was inherently sinful (Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical, 1993), 55-8; Mackin, *Marriage*, 127-8).

[49] Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911), 132.

[50] Michael Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2 (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 150-1.

[51] Will Deming, *Paul on Celibacy and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 53.

[52] Stoics regarded marriage as part of the divine ordinance of a creator god who required men and women to come together. Marriage was considered a virtue that generated happiness and well-being, in accord with nature. As a social device, it encouraged stability within society through 'men' organising themselves into city-states, contributing to the continued regeneration of responsible citizens and the maintenance of order (Deming, *Paul*, 54-5). In support of marriage, Musonius Rufus, a Stoic born around AD30, argued that the correlated anatomies of men and women was clear evidence for the goodness of marriage, to be exercised through their natural inclinations (Mackin, *Marriage*, 110). This theme was developed by Lactantius, an African Christian, who argued that the various senses such as sight were there as necessities of life. It followed that all sexual intercourse should be contained in marriage and that it was specifically for procreation. Furthermore, in a morally responsible society, all children born should be raised.

It is noted by John Macquarrie that unlike animals, sexual intercourse in humans is face to face (John MacQuarrie, *A Guide to the Sacraments* (London: SCM, 1997), 218). What Macquarrie does not go on to say is that sexual intercourse becomes a means of communication and an essential part of what it is to be human: this weakens the view that it is solely for procreation.

In contrast to the Stoics, Cynics denied any divine purpose to marriage, household and the creation to the city-state, demanding instead, individualism and self-sufficiency. The Cynics regarded marriage to be indulged in solely out of necessity for producing the next generation, a human invention, not divinely inspired (Anthony C. Thistleton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 483). Thus, in the cynic view, time devoted to philosophical debate took precedence over any preoccupation with family and other conventional responsibilities.

Paul, a Greek, would have been aware of these debates before his conversion. He adopts a largely Stoic view on marriage (even though in verse 1, his claim that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman' may suggest a Cynic view): in 1 Cor 7:4, marriage is presented as a complete fusion between husbands and wives, sharing not only their bodies through home and family, but also their souls. In 1 Cor 7:2-6, he asserts the mutuality of the marriage relationship in his concern to contain extra-marital sexual relationships and protection from the ready supply of prostitutes and mistresses from the surrounding gentile culture.[54] When Paul addresses problems of moral discipline within Christian marriage, he is underlining Jesus' ideal for monogamous marriage as protection against 'porneia' or sexual immorality. The on-going problem was the separation of the goodness of marriage from an association with sexual sinfulness: from 1Cor 7:8-9, it is clear that unmarried couples in sexual relationships were also of concern to Paul.

In his mission to establish a characteristic Christian identity for the new community, Paul saw marriage as having several functions: firstly, at a theological level, marriage was perceived to be the confirmation of God's intention for humankind based a full conjugal life of mutuality, reciprocity and equality (1 Cor 7:1-7). The mutuality here, which includes support and companionship, came through an expression of conjugal rights owed to each other in a sense of payment of debt, rather than conferring favours: vv. 3-4 implies this was a debt not owed elsewhere. Christians were reminded of Christ's exhortation not to divorce, vs. 11, reiterating God's will for permanence.[55] By merging primary Mosaic texts into an affirmation of monogamy and mutuality within Christian marriage, Paul gave the Christian communities a specific Christian ethic and morality for marriage, transforming the patriarchal model into one of shared responsibilities. In a climactic statement, the author of Eph 5:32, by tradition, Paul, declares 'this is a great mystery'. The statement is sandwiched

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The essence of the debate, to which marriage was a central issue, was the alignment of one's allegiance to a higher cause. In his Christian belief, Paul may be seen to be breaking through this controversy.

[53] J. Paul Sampley, *And The Two Shall Become One Flesh: A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

[54] Thistleton, *Corinthians*, 515-8; Deming, *Paul*, 122-3.

[55] It is noted that Paul did not invoke the Mathean exception: there is a distinct possibility that this teaching was not known to Paul, or even that it was not original to Jesus (Robertson and Plummer, *Corinthians*, 139).

between his quotation from Gen 2:24 and then speaking 'of Christ and the church': the understanding of the Greek 'musterion' in the context of vss.21-33 has been the subject of considerable debate, whether it refers to the preceding quotation from Genesis or is an eschatological interpretation of the institution of marriage.[56] The description of marriage in Genesis becomes a forerunner of marriage as an eschatological relationship that images Christ and His church: what this is saying is that the seeds of sacramental marriage may be found in Creation.[57]

The introduction of the new Christian ethics for marriage provided a motif for the relationship between Christ and his people and a model for the early Christian church as 'a community of love, justice and equity', the *ecclesia* or church family. The exhortation is to live one's life 'in the Spirit' giving Paul the lead to explain how Christian marriage and the relationship between husband and wife should be a paradigm of the relationship between Christ and His church. There is an inevitable tension generated between the patriarchal custom and practice of the Jewish heritage and the concept of equality that characterised the new Christian ethic (many Christians will have converted from Judaism). The household code reappears in Eph 5:21-33 in a form instantly recognisable within contemporary Judaic-Christian communities and appears to place the wife in an apparently inferior position: Paul declares that every husband's responsibility is to love his own wife (Eph 5:33). The love spoken of here is the unselfish and sacrificial love described in the Greek as 'agape'.[58] Paul makes further links with Old Testament scripture reiterated by Jesus, notably Lev 19:18b, 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself', and Song of Songs to support agape love as the major driving force.[59] In the Greek Septuagint, the

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[56] The word *musterion* is found 27 times in the New Testament and mostly, is translated as 'secret', as revealing the revelation of God's eternal purpose for all mankind (Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971) s.v.).

[57] Stijn Van den Bossche, 'The Gift of the Sacrament of Marriage', paper delivered at 'Committed Relationships: Have They a Future? Marriage and its 'Substitutes' in Contemporary Society', conference, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2006 (proceedings to be published in 2008).

[58] The position of women to be submissive to men survives as a recurring theme in the NT (1 Tim 2:8; 1 Cor11:3; 14:34; 1 Pet 3:1). The patriarchal model for human relationships is firmly re-established by Timothy, at least for bishops and deacons, declaring that women must be obedient to their husbands. They are restrained from taking on positions of authority in the church (1Tim 3:2-10. In 1Tim 2:13). There is a rejoinder that man was created before woman. This did not give the husband the control over a marriage as in former Judaic times: Timothy acknowledges that there is but 'one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus' (NRSV), so that a marriage could not be manipulated by human agencies (James D. G. Dunn, 'The Household Rules in the New Testament', in Barton, ed., *The Family*, 43-63).

[59] Sampley, *Ephesians*, 30, 75.

There is a preoccupation throughout the Old and new Testaments with sexual relationships outside of marriage, particularly adultery and its consequences. However, there were situations where

expression neighbour is also used as a term of endearment for one's bride.[60] At the core, there remains a requirement for wives to submit to their husbands, although several modern commentators prefer 'defer to' rather than 'submit', claiming this is nearer to the meaning of the original Greek.[61]

The adoption of the new ethical code as the pattern for life raised the marriage ideal to a state of purity, Eph 5:27, 32. Human marriage becomes an eschatological expression, rising above marriage defined by the household code alone. Paul uses humankind to express the eschatological hope by extending the relationship between Christ and His church to that between husbands and wives in marriage: the precursor, vs.21, sets the eschatological scene in which Christians must submit themselves totally to the Lord, against which other human relationships should be interpreted.[62] In the invocation of Genesis 2:24 'the two shall become one flesh' the mutual love of husband and wife is set against the corporate context of Christ and the church, that individually and jointly, we are members of His body, the church. Arguments between celibacy and marriage continued in the context of spiritual purity and eschatology as well as the reconciliation of Jesus' new ethics for marriage based on love rather than a strictly legalistic approach inherited from Judaism.

3.2.1.1 Paul and Celibacy

In spite of Paul's teaching of the new Christian ethics for marriage, 1 Cor 7:1-14, there persisted an association between sex and sinfulness, a consequence of the Fall.[63] The debate was whether it was better for the believer to be married or celibate in order

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an unmarried man could have pre-marital sexual relationships without offending the Judaic code. Although there are expressions of love in Song of Songs, I am more persuaded by the argument of A E Harvey, in his lecture to FLAME, Leeds, 1977, that the woman describing herself as *black and beautiful* (NSRV), or *comely* (KJV), declaring *why should I be like one who is veiled*? (SS 1:5) is a foreigner, a woman outside the faith community, probably Ethiopian and a prostitute hanging around the vineyards and plying her trade. Jewish men working in the fields would be permitted to have casual sex without infringing their purity laws.

[60] Sampley, *Ephesians*, 32-3.

[61] The Greek, *hupotasso*, derives from the preposition *hupo*, meaning 'under' or in 'an inferior position' and *tasso*, a verb 'to arrange in an orderly manner'. Although 'defer' is one possible translation, the sense of the word is to place the husband superior to his wife (Sampley, *Ephesians*, 28-9; Mackin, *Marriage*, 64).

[62] The preoccupation with purity in Eph 5:26-7 comes directly from Jewish traditions such as the washing away of sins by water and the cultic purifactory bath that the wife took in preparation for her wedding. A betrothal was valid only if the woman was in a state of total purity. It is suggested that this passage is an allegory for the aspiration of the church on earth (Sampley, *Ephesians*, 71, 117).

[63] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 42. Brueggemann challenges the traditional association between Adam and Eve's nakedness and human sinfulness in favour of symbolism of a broken covenant and their vulnerability.

to prepare for the second coming. Paul's immediate response was to call for a universal ethic, not to engage in irregular sexual relationships. There is an inference in 1 Cor 7:7-9 that sexual intimacy and celibacy are both gifts from God, and therefore 'good' and for the benefit of humankind.

This does not resolve the dilemma as to which is superior in terms of service to God, celibacy, or marriage. Marriage, centred about sex and procreation, was regarded as inferior to celibacy because of its physical, sexual nature: the motivation for sex for procreation, self-satisfaction or to commit adultery can never be uniquely separated. In addition, the Cynic view was that sex is distracting and would render a person ritually impure and religiously unfit for prayer. This prompts Paul to urge any who are single, whether not yet married, including widows, to restrain from sexual activity (1 Cor 7:8).[64] This is not advocating celibacy for all: to remain celibate is a particular gift from God (1 Cor 7:8-10). For those disinclined to remain celibate, Paul invokes Gen 2:18, affirming the goodness of marriage and that one should not be dissuaded from marriage or married life.[65]

3.2.3 Greek Church Fathers and Marriage

From the deliberations of early theologians such as Clement, Origen, Gregory, John Chrysostom and Augustine there came a recognisably Christian view of marriage. Origen, was persuaded by the argument that marriage was a divine gift, created by God as a channel of salvation, though he was still unable to resolve the dilemma posed by the sexual nature of marriage.[66] Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus of Lyons, writing about fifty years after Paul, affirmed that marriage was not and could not be always evil: given by the one and true creator God as part of the mystery of creation marriage must be intrinsically good.[67]

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[64] Although Paul does not restrain widows from remarrying, he imposes qualifications (1 Cor 7:39-40). Paul has perceived a risk of widows marrying non-believers, thereby diluting the Christian community. Widows were often wealthy through inheriting husband's estates, money which could be channelled into establishing Christian foundations, churches, hospices, charities and so on. This was one of the ways in which the church began to acquire its wealth.

[65] Thistleton, *Corinthians,* 499.

[66] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 281.

[67] Lawler, Michael G. Lawler, *Secular Marriage Christian Sacrament* (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty Third Publications, 1985), 26; Mackin, *Marriage*, 88.

The Greek Church Fathers maintained that the purpose of marriage was primarily for procreation, recalling God's command to Abraham to be a father to all nations. It was subject to 'divine charisma', what would become referred to as a state of grace, ensuring that the partners could live together in mutuality and harmony. Sexual activity other than for procreation was perceived to be a violation of nature, in Jerome's words, 'filth and lust', and therefore marriage required continence on the part of believers.[68] Chrysostom, following Paul, recognised a role for marriage in providing a refuge for 'lustful passion', but intercourse indulged for any purpose other than procreation was considered a violation of God's plan. To be a lover of God and a lover of pleasure were seen to be mutually exclusive. In addition, Origen declared that one should restrict sexual intercourse to certain 'legitimate' times.[69]

Clement declared a secondary virtue of marriage to be that it is the role of the wife to bring comfort to her husband, not just during the early days of marriage but to look after him in old age. In return, it was the husband's duty to help a pious wife seek salvation. This hints at fulfilment, Gen 2:18.

Justin Martyr maintained that if one chose to forego marriage, then one should remain celibate.[70] This was not to detract from marriage, but to extol the virtues of celibacy and encourage those unmarried to devote their lives wholly to the service of the Lord. There was difficulty in justifying within the Gospels and Epistles the raising of marriage above celibacy as God's preferred way to gain salvation: marriage, therefore, was reserved for those who could not achieve celibacy.[71]

Of all the Church Fathers, it was Augustine who developed a systematic insight into the theology of marriage, evolving principles that were absorbed into the marriage tradition many centuries later.[72]

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[68] Mackin, *Marriage*, 119.

[69] Lawler, *Sacrament*, 55.

This could be counterproductive, as with the embarrassment caused to (St.) Elizabeth who conceived late in life, at a time when she would not normally have been expected to be fertile, much less in a sexual relationship (Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 28).

[70] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue*, 8, 28, cited in Liz Carmichael, *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2004), 41.

[71] Mackin, *Marriage*, 98-9

[72] Lawler, *Secular Marriage*, 29.

3.2.4 Augustine and Marriage

Augustine made a major contribution to the early development of the Christian marriage tradition through his declaration of the three 'goods of marriage', *fides*, *proles* and *sacramentum*.[73] He developed his thesis from his observation of marriage as God's intention for humankind that transcended the Fall and mankind's sinfulness, in an attempt to counter the Manichean and Pelagian influences.[74]

The first good, *fides*, meaning fidelity and chastity in all behaviour within marriage, described the search for a state of purity that could be reconciled with the need for procreation. The goodness of sexual intercourse remained a major problem for the early church: Tertullian, in *Ad uxorem*, portrayed the Christ-like family as a microcosm of monastic life arguing that sex was without sin only when attempting to procreate.[75] This led Augustine to argue that marriage is not established until first sexual intercourse, consistent with his long-standing view that 'propagation of children is the natural and legitimate purpose of marriage'.[76]

The second good, *proles*, was oriented towards procreation, not just the bringing of children into the world but overseeing their nurture and development. Augustine maintained a view that lovemaking was sinless when motivated by procreation. In a later judgement, passion driven sex was deemed acceptable if it was to satisfy one's spouse when, saving him or her from committing adultery, provided there was no expression of pleasure(!).[77] This makes little concession to lovemaking for motives of tenderness, celebration or happiness, desire to console and many more of the normal relations between spouses.[78] A much more significant insight was the possibility of leading a celibate life within marriage, without the marriage being invalidated.[79] One interpretation is that this appears to extend the concession from Paul for temporary

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[73] Augustine, *De Bono Conugali: The Good of Marriage*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001); Lawler, *Secular Marriage*, 32.
[74] Mackin, *Marriage*, 129.
[75] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 280-1.
[76] Mackin, *Marriage*, 142.
[77] Mackin, *Marriage*, 130.
[78] There are hints that this may be to do with the custom of arranged marriages prevalent in the culture of the time: sexual relationships for pleasure were commonly sought through concubinage. Augustine himself was not without his mistress in his earlier life, one for whom he clearly had a great fondness (Mackin, *Marriage*, 131).
[79] A celibate marriage is a contradiction. In Tobit 8:5, 8, from about 200 BCE, Tobias and Sarah remained celibate for three nights, emphasising the holiness of their wedding, but after the third night, were 'joined in their own wedlock'.

sexual abstinence to continence in post-menopausal marriages. It may also imply that within the Christian church, marriage does not need to be procreative to be fulfilled, accepting that some are barren from the start.

All cultures that have placed procreation at the core of family life are dominated by 'bonum prolis', the legitimate child as opposed to the *confusio prolis* and illegitimacy, the consequence of infidelity or misconduct. Consanguinity and legitimacy had been issues of concern at least since the formulating of the Pentateuch.[80]

This leads to the third 'good', that marriage is more than a relationship of friendship but involves a solemn obligation or *sacramentum.* The first hint of marriage being referred to as sacramental appears to be Jerome's translation of 'musterion mega' in Eph 5:32 in the Vulgate as sacramentum rather than 'great mystery' (as is found in a majority of New Testament translations): human nature can echo divine intent as revealed through Creation.[81] Any lesser relationship would be a contract or 'vinculum', a 'joining together'.[82] The commitment in marriage had a 'sacral' element meaning spouses have a lifelong obligation to remain faithful to each other. Neither adultery nor separation could break the bond.[83] This raised marriage from being a contract, central within Judaism to a relationship of personal commitment, imaging God's covenant with humankind made through Creation. Christian marriage was perceived to possess its own distinctive and absolute values through its intention for permanence and indissolubility, unlike, for example, the Roman custom where consent to marry was only for as long as the relationship remained sustainable.[84]

Augustine did not use 'sacramentum' to signify a sacrament in the sense which allows God's grace to enter into their lives: instead, he sought to distinguish a particular quality of Christian marriage which embodied permanence as opposed to secular marriage which provided for the first two goods as universal benefits for believers and

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[80] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 282.
[81] Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics,* vol. 3, *Sex* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), 125.
[82] By describing marriage as *sacramentum*, the Early Church Fathers had taken a legal term for 'oath of fidelity', 'iuramentum', and given it a new religious interpretation. Thus marriage is perceived as both a legal and sacral bond resulting from obligations under oath subject to both Biblical justification and law (Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality,* 284; Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Wonderful and Sacred Mystery* (Washington: Pastoral, 1992), 29).
[83] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 283.
[84] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 241.

non-believers alike.[85] All marriage share the commonality of *'fides'* and *'proles'* as natural goods: it was the third good, *sacramentum,* calling for permanence and indissolubility, which distinguished marriage within the Christian community from surrounding pagan practices.[86]

3.3 Marriage in The Western Christian Tradition

As Christianity spread through Europe, many of its practices including marriage were exposed to enculturation.[87] For ordinary people, marriage remained a domestic issue subject to customary law. Nevertheless, the eleventh century onwards saw the start of systematic developments in the theology and laws of marriage as the Western church gradually assumed responsibility for the legal, liturgical and pastoral oversight of marriage. The Roman Catholic Church emerged as a direct descendant of the New Testament churches and it fell to the theologians such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus to continue arguing for the sacramental meaning of marriage.[88] However, through Reformation, many of the tenets of the sacramental tradition were challenged, leading to the emergence of a distinctive Protestant view of marriage. Some of the significant developments are described below.

3.3.1 Marriage in the Sacramental Tradition

From the first Millennium onwards, the Roman Catholic Church began to establish its authority within Western Christendom, giving it theological and legal control over marriage. The twelfth century saw the beginnings of a sacramental tradition that is familiar to the Christian church today.

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[85] Mackin, *Marriage*, 139; Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 284.

[86] John Witte Jr., *From Sacrament to Contract. Marriage, Religion and Law in the Western Tradition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 22.

[87] A fusion of Roman, Northern Germanic and other traditions produced three basic requirements for a valid marriage. These were consent between the partners to marry, the father 'giving away' the bride, symbolising the handing over of power or authority, and consummation through first intercourse. By the thirteenth century, further qualifications were added: the spouses had to present themselves at the portal of the church where the priest would enquire if there were any impediments and secondly, the families would exchange dowry and wedding gifts. The bride and groom could then enter the church for a blessing and the wedding mass (Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England. Modes of Reproduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 310; Thielicke, *Ethics*, 128, n. 10; Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods* (Boston: E. J. Brill, 2001), 75-80).

[88] John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings,* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1962); Lawler, *Secular Marriage*, 62; Witte, *Sacrament*, 23.

In 1184, the Council of Verona confirmed marriage to be a sacrament, equal in status to other sacraments, confirming the interpretation of 'musterion mega' as 'sacrament'.[89] Marriage was henceforth declared to contain an objective bond that once established, is protected from any action or interference by human agencies. Nevertheless, there was still a close association between sexual behaviour and sinfulness that created a tension between marriage and the eschatological call to abstinence. The spiritual celibate life translated through asceticism and celibacy, and the leading of a Godly life within marriage was still considered superior and more virtuous than the temporal state of marriage and family.[90]

Peter Lombard reflected Pauline teaching on the superiority of a celibate life promoting spiritual contemplation. In support of marriage, he argued that unlike the other sacraments of the church, it was coeval with the creation of humankind, and that sexual intercourse provided a stronger binding force between human beings than any other relationship. Marriage was created not primarily as a remedy for sin but to fulfil an obligation to procreate.[91] Unease continued. The sexual nature of marriage was still regarded as a 'medicinum', to quench sexual desire and a cure for untoward, non-innocent passion, as declared by Paul. Lombard interpreted Paul's 'indulgence' (1 Cor 7:1-2,6) as 'concession', describing sexual intercourse because of incontinence as a 'minor evil' that is 'tolerated' because it is not 'prohibited'. Thus, Lombard deemed marriage a 'minor good' in the order of creation but whereas marriage fitted God's purpose, if it kept a person from sin, it did not necessarily contribute to their virtue.[92]

In this way, marriage was understood as having both earthly and spiritual dimensions. Firstly, it serviced humankind's natural inclinations and in that respect, was governed by covenant. However, it was also a visible sign or image of Christ and his church, giving rise to the view that marriage was not consenting to 'carnal copula' but to a conjugal society, *concensus conugalis societas,* and Lombard expanded the link between marriage and the metaphorical marriage between Christ and his church.[93] The

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[89] Thatcher, *Modernity*, 235.
[90] Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 311.
[91] Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, Book 4, Distinction 26 in Phillipp W. Roseman, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 171.
[92] Rosemann, *Lombard,* 174; Witte, *Sacrament*, 24.
[93] Rosemann, *Lombard*, 178.

debate whether marriage was instituted as sacramental by Christ or was established through creation was not fully resolved.[94]

In consequence, marriage as a sacrament rather than a contractual relationship could be a channel of grace, that once opened, could not be closed: the marriage could not then be dissolved. Lesser arguments invoked by Scotus, in his commentary on Distinction 26 of Lombard's book of Sentences, highlighted amongst other issues the nurture given to children that necessitated God's grace through a permanent, conjugal relationship.[95] Fundamental questions remained, in particular, how the sacramental quality was to be conferred. There was a problem that unlike other sacraments such as Baptism and Eucharist where the priest played an integral part, marriage could be and often was celebrated outside the church's jurisdiction. None of these required any degree of formality to be valid, and although canon law prescribed certain impediments to ensure a licit marriage, there could be little reliable enforcement or protection against irregularities. Thomas Aquinas argued that marriage was part of nature's intent, orienting it towards procreation and family. The Lateran Council first established the principle that no minister needed to be present to establish a valid marriage, but that the two parties were themselves 'ministers of the sacrament'.[96] Lombard made clear the distinction between a declaration of intent or betrothal, and consent to live henceforth as man and wife, united through a sacramental bond.[97] Hence, the medieval church recognised three stages of establishing a marriage, (i) promises exchanged in the future tense to confirm a betrothal, (ii) exchange of vows in the present tense and (iii) consummation through voluntary sexual intercourse. An additional stage in church marriage was the conferring of a priestly blessing. However, none of these resolved the argument at which point the sacrament was conferred, as will be seen below.

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[94] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), 430ff; see also n. 67.
[95] Theodore Mackin, S. J., *The Marital Sacrament* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 336.
[96] William Hay, *Lectures on Marriage (1533-35)*, trans. J. Barry (Edinburgh: Stair Society, 1967), 31.
[97] The Roman tradition was further reinforced by a similar tradition of betrothal common to the Germanic and Frankish peoples. Intercourse during betrothal was not normally permitted but if it was shown to have occurred, then a marriage was established immediately (Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 291).

(i) Consent

The early Christian church argued vociferously as to what constituted marriage, whether it was consent or consummation. Much debate centred on Mary and Joseph and how to regard their marital status (this was at a time when there may have been little by way of ceremony to mark the transition from betrothal to marriage).[98] Ambrose took the view that marriage commenced as soon as the woman was joined to her husband rather than when sexual intercourse took place. This builds on the passage in Tobit describing the marriage of Tobias and Raguel who undertook three nights of prayer and contemplation before coming together, accentuating the holiness of marriage.[99] Jerome took an opposite view that marriage was essentially a sexual relationship and could not exist without sexual intercourse. He described Mary and Joseph as being in an 'unconsummated marriage', effectively, betrothal. Augustine, however, supported the argument that marriage starts as soon as a betrothal is entered into, that the first joining of two persons is sacramental, dissoluble only through the death of one partner. According to Augustine, Mary and Joseph possessed all three benefits or goods of marriage and this gave the early church sufficient insight to recognise their unconsummated relationship as a valid marriage. The meaning of marriage is through an expectation of consummation rather than consummation itself.[100] This helps circumvent arguments over what actually constitutes 'consummation' that will be discussed below.

Consent became essential to the establishment of any marriage and a common feature of all weddings was the simple exchange of vows through a legally prescribed form of words.[101] By the late thirteenth century, the canonists' view was that a marriage was rendered sacramental through the simple exchange of vows in the present tense whether or not it is celebrated in church. Through their vows, the bridal couple administered the sacrament to each other; their mutual consent was the basis for creating a sacramental union.[102] Thomas Aquinas declared the exchange of consensual

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[98] Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church*, 337-44.
[99] Mark Searle and Kenneth W. Stevenson, *Documents of the Marriage Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 21.
[100] Edward Schillebeekx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), 291.
[101] See discussion on common law marriage in Chapter 3.
[102] Thielicke, *Ethics*, 128.

vows to be binding and therefore the basis for bestowing a sacrament.[103] The two parties were themselves 'ministers of the sacrament', their own consciences through faith were deemed sufficient to confirm the integrity of the union. The role of consummation was to make the marriage permanent, in accordance with its first 'good', for procreation.[104]

The difficulty is that the form of consent is not specifically Christian: Scotus recognised the reality that pagans, Jews or Muslims could establish equally valid marriages, though not sacraments as instituted by Christ even though they may have their own particular belief in God.[105] It is unclear who is linked through the commitment-bond, the spouses alone, each spouse with God singly, or the spouses jointly with each other and simultaneously with God.[106]

(ii) Priestly Blessing

In comparison with other sacraments administered by a priest, John Duns Scotus argued that it was that the blessing by a priest during the wedding that rendered the marriage sacramental: his action was comparable in nature to the sprinkling of holy water during Baptism or the administration of the Eucharist. However, it has already been accepted that a priest need not be present and if he was, was perceived to have a very limited and peripheral involvement in the formation of the marriage. Secondly, the couple had already exchanged vows on becoming betrothed and the marriage being brought before God was already accomplished. Thirdly, at a time when the majority of marriages took place outside of the church in the form of common law marriage, to declare them non-sacramental was to deny couples the pastoral care of the church.[107] The church would then have to admit marriages between non-Christians, as with marriage based on consent.

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[103] Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Sentences,* quoted in Theodore Mackin, *Divorce and* Remarriage (New York: Paulist, 1984), 343.
[104] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (N.Y.: Benziger Brothers, 1947-8), Pt. II-II, q. 100.
[105] Mackin, *Sacrament*, 338.
[106] Mackin, *What is Marriage?*, 139.
[107] Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 271.

(iii) Consummation

Canonists such as Gratian in Bologna and Peter Lombard in Paris determined that in the absence of certain prescribed impediments, the mutual consent of the partners was sufficient to establish a legally valid marriage that became indissoluble once it was consummated.[108] They considered that marriage differed from the other sacraments of the church: it was holy, but at the same time, inferior to virginity. The systemisation of canon law in Gratian's Decretum pointed towards consummation of the marriage by sexual intercourse, the final act in the marriage process, to open the channel of grace.

The assumption of permanence meant that second marriages could not be recognised as fully Christian, giving rise to expressions such as 'respectable whoredom'.[109] The refusing of a blessing on second marriages is found in the Sarum Manual of 1543: the second marriage, whether of the man and woman or the woman alone, was regarded as 'defective sacramentally' by virtue of not being one to one 'as is the marriage of Christ and the church'. An exception was when a previously married man married a virgin: in this situation, the marriage could be blessed(!).[110] There are echoes of Tertullian who regarded marriages in which one partner was not a believer to be 'evilly founded': a blessing could be conferred only on the marriage of two baptised Christians.[111]

The Council of Trent, through the decree of Tametsi, 1563, confirmed the mediaeval view of sacramental marriage within Roman Catholic Church as a 'natural, contractual, and spiritual institution created by the Father and sanctified by the

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[108] This extended the arguments of the Early Church Fathers and incorporated a Northern European tradition that placed great importance on consummation (Witte, *Sacrament*, 33).
[109] Schille*beeckx*, *Human Reality*, 251, n. 24.
[110] Searle and Stevenson, *Marriage Liturgy*, 175. The obvious question is 'how do they know?'. The evidence from the Bible is that if there was any doubt over a bride's virginity, her parents were required to provide evidence in the form of her unstained sheet or chemise to demonstrate intercourse has not taken place, Dt 22:17. The practice of challenging a bride's virtue through production of a blood-stained sheet is claimed to continue today. See, for example, IVP Study Bible, 'Marriage', www.lion-publishing.co.uk.
[111] It is conjectural that there may have been a nuptial mass incorporating a marriage blessing as early as the fourth century. However, the first intimation of nuptial mass with priestly blessing of a civilly contracted or family marriage is found in the fourth and fifth centuries. The odes of Paulinus of Nola (circa 353-431) include a marriage rite, but directed towards clerical marriage, and not the Christian community as a whole (Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 30, 255, 280).

Son'.[112] The teachings of the Council were formulated into a catechism that has remained substantially unaltered to the present day. The Council affirmed Gen 2:24 as a paradigm for marriage as a permanent bond of natural love perfected through grace. The bond was declared indissoluble in accordance with earlier church teaching and biblical interpretation. Marriage was brought under church control with the reading of banns, involvement of a priest, and the presence of witnesses, helping remove many of the abuses of marriage. However, there is an implicit shift in marriage as a sacrament, that although divinely created by God, its celebration incorporated a human element. This point was considered by Scotus: he declared that marriage was a sacrament decreed by God, but that human convention determined the precise form in which it was to be celebrated.[113] Implicit in this is that marriages conducted outside the Roman Catholic Church without a priest presiding, even though perfectly legal, could not be recognised as sacramental.

3.3.2 Reformation and Marriage

During the fifteenth century, some powerful and influential scholars emerged who challenged the Roman Catholic doctrine on marriage. This came at a time when many Christians were seen to be unafraid to desecrate the sacrament of marriage through sexual indiscipline and immorality leading to prostitution adultery, incest, and other practices.[114]

The Renaissance theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam was influential in stimulating the debates that led to Reformation. He questioned the whole nature of marriage, in particular, whether it could truly be considered sacramental because of its dual nature as a sacrament of the church and a civil contract.[115] Erasmus considered there were three things by which humans were bound; these were nature, law and religion. Nature encompassed all relationships established through marriage and procreation, indeed, 'any relationship worthy of respect'. The law sought to protect certain relationships through contracts, offering legal redress and imposing penalties where there is breakdown. A significant development was to recognise that a true marriage

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[112] H. J. Schroeder, *Councils and Decrees of the Councils of* Trent, (St. Louis, Missouri: 1941), 10.
[113] Mackin, *Sacrament*, 336.
[114] Robert C. Schultz (ed.), *Luther's Works*, 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 11-49.
[115] Desiderius Erasmus, 'The Institution of Christian Matrimony', *Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. Michael J. Heath, vol. 69 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 225-234.

starts through friendship and like friendship, is entered on a basis of trust. It is through religion that marriage may be raised above the law. Thus, a marriage instituted by God and inspired through heavenly love may be deemed to assume sacramental qualities.

For a marriage to be sacramental, Erasmus argued that it needed some outward symbol or sign beyond that of the earthly union of two people coming together: the creation of an indissoluble bond may be an indication of divine intention but cannot be confirmed in less than one's lifetime. Recalling Heb 1:6, Erasmus described the visible union of a man and woman solely as an indication of the 'supreme mystery', mediated through love. However, if partners enter a marriage without the intention of permanence, they become spouses in a human sense only. Whether or not a marriage could be described as sacramental was fraught with difficulty and uncertainty.

On theological grounds, the Reformers rejected the Roman Catholic interpretation of sacramental marriage. Their objection was that although marriage was a paradigm for a faithful and loving relationship between God and humankind, that in itself did not render it sacramental.[116] God's grace through being married is not promised anywhere in the Bible, though marriage may in itself be a sign.[117]

With differing biblical interpretation and given the interaction between church and state over the theology and legislation of marriage what may be grouped together under the general banner of 'Reformation' in fact spawned several different traditions. Three main traditions are considered here, Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism, all of which have been prominent in shaping our contemporary understanding of Christian marriage, though with some important differences. The Lutheran reformation developed a new theological understanding of marriage as a social estate that led to new interpretations of the marriage law in Germany. However, Germany at that time was a federation of more than three hundred city-states and many of the new provisions were subject to local interpretation. In contrast, Calvinism started as a more coherent movement and developed its covenantal theological model for marriage from legal interpretations of the law on marriage.[118] In contrast to both of

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[116] Thatcher, *Modernity*, 235.
[117] Atkinson, *Have and to Hold*, 51.
[118] Witte, *Sacrament*, 130.

these movements, the Anglican reformation, evolving over a much longer period, presented marriage as a commonwealth between church and state, attributing to it both legal and theological significance.

3.3.2.1 Luther: Marriage as Social Estate

Reformers such as Luther disagreed with the translation of 'musterion mega' as sacrament, arguing that the Roman Church was basing its stance on an incorrect interpretation of Eph 5:32.[119] They reiterated their view that marriage was a worldly institution for all humankind and not the monopoly of the baptised. At the same time, marriage could come to reflect God's faithfulness to His people through the goods of marriage: the necessity for believers is to live their married life in the love shown by Christ for his church. Lutherans argued that marriage assumed moral or religious and civil dimensions, described in terms of a structure having both vertical and horizontal elements.[120] Marriage remained rooted in the Biblical tradition and the teaching of the goods of marriage of mutual support, procreation, and faithfulness by the Early Church Fathers. Hence, the vertical dimension of the covenant links marriage to God, through the liturgy. The horizontal dimension describes the man and wife linked through their pledges to each other, in turn supported by their peers, minister and, a particular innovation of the reformers, civil magistrates. Thus, the covenant that was fundamentally founded upon Biblical interpretation took on a legal dimension.

Responsibility for the institution was to be the prerogative of civil law, a change that reinforced the social obligations of marriage. This helped resolve one of the dilemmas that had troubled former traditions, the holiness of marriages involving unbelievers. Marriage became a secular issue so far as the ceremony was concerned, thus opening it up to civil control and regulation. However, through the theological interpretation of the bond, the church assumed a pastoral role. The minister, in blessing the bride and groom, is acting as a witness to the couple having contracted their marriage as a civil public act in the sight of God.[121]

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[119] Paul Althaus, *The Ethics of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 89.
[120] Schultz, *Luther's Works*, 46, 265.
[121] Althaus, 91.

In the Lutheran tradition, sexuality was regarded as a force for good within God's creation, expressed through the interdependence of men and women and their desire to procreate. Marriage, based upon love, was perceived to be essential to the outworking of God's creation and part of the will of God.[122] At the same time, Luther recognised the sinfulness of the world, and distinguished between agape, preached in the New Testament, and *eros*, associated with lust and abusive sexual practices. Marriage would become degraded when agape, a love that is grace, was absent, but through faith a couple could move to a state of grace and resist the inevitable sinfulness of the world. In a marriage characterised by faithfulness, sexual activity was not solely procreative, but could be a means of expressing mutual joy and affection. Thus, Luther recognised that even though the Christian tradition on marriage was derived from Jesus' teaching, it brought with it social and legal responsibilities. In particular, there were areas that were subject to civil law such as consent to the marriage, impediments to a lawful union and divorce.

There was concern that any consent to marry should be given freely, demonstrated by marriage being conducted in public in the presence of witnesses and with the consent of parents for minors.[123] The exchange of promises alone made in good faith before God created a valid, indissoluble marriage, even though the marriage had yet be consummated: any extra-marital sexual relationship from this time onwards would be declared adulterous. The parents (or guardians) were acting as 'apostles, bishops and priests to their children' and consequently giving God's consent.[124] Vows were to be exchanged in the present tense: the Roman Catholic distinction between betrothal and marriage was suppressed, as was the imperative for consummation.

The Lutheran reformers considered that many of the impediments to marriage in the Roman Catholic Church had become confused or corrupted and were not necessarily supported by Biblical teaching. A major change in their understanding was that marriage should be open to all, and this extended to clergy and others previously committed to a celibate life.[125] Blood and family ties were rationalised, removing such restrictions as marriage to godparents. Spiritual impediments were also removed so

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[122] Althaus, *Luther*, 86.
[123] Witte, 64. (Witte quotes ordinances from several German jurisdictions: My knowledge of German is insufficient to comment directly).
[124] Schultz, *Luther's Works*, 46, 205ff.
[125] Schultz, *Luther's Works*, 35, 138; 45, 28.

that non-Christians or persons guilty of 'mortal sins' such as previous sexual crimes were not prevented from marrying. The marriage ceremony, in the Reformers view, did not itself impart sanctifying grace and therefore removed all requirements for prerequisite purity.[126] This invites two particular consequences: firstly, it starts to devalue virginity. This will impact directly on social present-day social attitudes in the context of cohabitation. Secondly, remarriage after divorce becomes theologically acceptable, in contrast to the Roman Catholic teaching that partners to a marriage that had irretrievably broken down were still bound by their marriage vows. The Reformers' view was that irreconcilable separation effectively constituted dissolution of the marriage.[127]

3.3.2.2 Calvin: Marriage as Covenant

The Calvinist reforms established new legal ordinances for marriage: as with the Lutheran movement, their intentions were to remove the many injustices caused by Roman Catholic canon law. Measures introduced to circumvent coercive and illicit marriages resembled those of the Lutheran church. However, the Calvinists retained betrothal: a couple was required to register their betrothal with a local civil magistrate, who would give public notice of their intended nuptials, and give them a signed marriage certificate. Banns were required to be read from a pulpit for three successive Sundays. This marriage certificate did not confirm they were married: that required a subsequent church wedding and was expected to take place within six weeks.

In parallel with the sacramental model, Calvin viewed marriage as a lifelong, monogamous union between a man and women of proven fitness. A person's fitness to marry was governed by the Leviticus 18 and 20: Any deviation from the 'norm' barred a person from marriage, and if found to be broken, the marriage would be annulled and civil and/or spiritual sanctions meted out to the offender.

Calvin inherited the two-kingdom model of Luther on to which he superimposed his own covenantal doctrine of marriage. He endorsed the human nature of marriage but

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[126] R. H. Helmholtz, *The Spirit of the Classical Canon Law* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 240-1.
[127] Schultz, *Luther's Works*, 46, 276.

gave it a spiritual dimension.[128] Calvin's contemporary, Heinrich Bullinger, in his book *The Christen State of Matrimonie,* viewed marriage as a covenantal bond between a man and woman, secured through their mutual consent but declaring that

> it is god hymselfe that knytteth the knot of marriage.[129]

The consent of both partners was required and to be

> freely given in spirit of love, not carnal desire. . . consenting of harlots is carnal and wicked.[130]

Bullinger distinguished sacramental marriage from any other sort of relationship, describing it as

> two persones which are of lyke kynde & complexion, of like nature and disposision/ of like manner and occupenye/ should bear more will the one toward the other than they that have no mutuall felashippe herrin.[131]

Marriage was affirmed as an honourable and holy estate available to all, the first 'good' of which is procreation.[132] The Calvinist marriage was regarded as a 'good ordinance' and sacred, 'a holy fellowship'.[133] God was involved in the covenant through parental consent whereas the witnesses, the minister and the civil magistrate gave the marriage transparency: if any one element was missing, then the marriage would not be properly constituted. The marriage was required to be a sober and solemn occasion conducted in church and in public. The final step towards establishing a fully valid marriage was that the couple should enter their first home together to commence cohabitation. This continued an ancient tradition of escorting the bride and groom to the bridal chamber and the blessing of the room to bring about consummation and a fruitful outcome.[134]

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[128] John Witte Jnr., 'Moderate Religious Liberty in the Theology of John Calvin', *Calvin Theological Journal,* 31 (1996), 359.
[129] Bullinger, Heinrich, *The Christen State of Matrimonye,* trans. Myles Coverdale (Amsterdam: Walter J. Johnson, 1974), chap ix, xx.
[130] Bullinger, *Matrimonye, chap. ix, xx.*
[131] Bullinger, *Matrimonye*, chap. ix, xx.
[132] Bullinger, *Matrimonye, Chap. x, xxiii.*
[133] See, for example, Commentaries on Gen 2:21, 2:24, Mal 2:14, Matt 19:11 (John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1843-1850)). Others are noted in Witte, *Sacrament,* Chap. 3, n. 187.
[134] Witte, *Sacrament*, 146.

Although Bullinger extolled the value of love in a marriage, he was preoccupied with creating purity, firstly through consanguinity, and then declaring marriage a 'remedy' for 'carnal sins': but however well intentioned and regulated a marriage, no relationship was immune to lust, adultery and other 'abominable sins'. Therefore, marriage needed some remedy. Although divorce was permitted, this was for adultery only: Calvin's view was that other problems, even if they had already led to separation, should be subject to reconciliation. This imposed strict codes of personal conduct within marriage, but which extended to single persons in that any sort of sexual exploitation was discouraged to the extent of disapproving of activities such as dancing.[135] Where divorce was permitted, it could be achieved only through an independent third party, not at the hands of the couple themselves, with the guilty party being punished. The innocent party would then be free to remarry on the practical grounds that refusal would inevitably lead a person into a sinful lifestyle.[136]

Calvin understood the first good of marriage to be the love and mutuality that primarily caused the man and woman to be joined. However, he regarded procreation as the most important purpose of marriage, to the extent that any physical impediment or dysfunctional behaviour that would prevent procreation could be sufficient to bar a person from marrying.[137] Equally important was his view that marriage served as a protection against lust and incontinence.[138] Where a couple were not blessed with children, they were expected to redouble their efforts to build a strong marriage based on love and mutuality.

Marriage was to be celebrated as both a civil and religious event. Entry to marriage was made far more difficult than in the Lutheran model through a closer alliance with ancient household codes. In addition, harking back to the early church, Christians were discouraged from marrying unbelievers, who would not be sympathetic to the worship of God and the creation of a marriage in the spirit of Christ and his church.[139] Once entered, marriage was virtually indissoluble: such attitudes on divorce and remarriage and insistence on purity would certainly discourage cohabitation.

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[135] Sermons on Dt 22:5-8, 28:25, 22:25-30; comm. Lev 20:10, 22:22-7 (Calvin, *Commentaries*).
[136] Bullinger, *Matrimonie*, chap. xiv.
[137] Witte, *Sacrament*, 105.
[138] Gen 16:1-6 (Calvin, *Commentaries*).
[139] Sermon Dt 21:10-14 (Calvin, *Commentaries*).

3.3.2.3 The Anglican Tradition: Marriage as Commonwealth

Henry VIII's imperative to ensure the succession of the monarchy opened the way for English reformers to argue for changes that led eventually to a distinctive Anglican interpretation of marriage (at that time, there was already an undercurrent of anti-Catholicism from such as John Wycliff and William of Ockham). The English Reformation was influenced by the Lutheran and Calvinist reformations, but with significant differences. The commonwealth model encapsulated the traditional hierarchies of state over church, church over household, parent over child and husband over wife. Thus, there was an established order that subordinated the family to the church and state.

As well as Heinrich Bullinger, there were other influential writers in the sixteenth century such as Thomas Becon and Martin Bucer. It was through Becon, chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer, that the Heinrich Bullinger's treatise on matrimony was first translated and published in 1541. Becon had argued particularly for clerical marriage and for divorce and remarriage (these practices remained illegal in England until 1547 and caused the book to be censored. It was subsequently republished under a pen-name).[140] Like his continental contemporaries, he witnessed marriage in decay, not helped by the imposition of clerical celibacy, for example, the church enabled the rich to obtain easy annulments through the payment of dispensations, a facility out of reach of the poor, many of whom were condemned to live in permanently unhappy households. In common with Calvin, he reordered the threefold goods of marriage into love, procreation, and deterrence from sin. This was to emphasise the role of marital love in serving the couple's well-being, elevating marriage to be the 'best estate' and 'a thynge of great excellency'.[141] The principal reforms supported by Becon were for parental consent, church proclamation, and consecration of marriage, reform of the impediments, ending clerical celibacy, divorce with remarriage and remarriage for widows and widowers.[142] Where he was less certain was on the

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[140] See J. Ayre (ed.), *The Early Works of Thomas Becon,* 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843).
[141] Thomas Becon in Preface to Bullinger. *Golden Booke,* folios A.ii.b, A.iii.
[142] Cox J. E. (ed.), *Miscellaneous Writings of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843), 94-5, 168-9, 328-9, 359-60.

question of the sacramental character of marriage and by extension, the authority of the church in assuming jurisdiction over marriage.[143]

Martin Bucer treated marriage as a social contract between spouses for mutual help.[144] In line with Luther's 'Two Kingdom' theory, he regarded marriage to be owned by humankind, created for the common good, serving the needs of men, but subject to Godly norms through the Mosaic Law. This became understood as the commonwealth model. He declared that a good marriage should be made of four elements: These are cohabitation (the couple should live together), they should love each other, the husband should be the 'head and preserver of the wife' and fourthly, they should not withhold 'conjugal benevolence'.[145] This is significant because of its inclusion of living together and love. Bucer argued that if the common good is not well served by a marriage, then it should be dissolved and the parties permitted to remarry. This challenged the church and its sacramental model of marriage that permitted separation only.[146] The Roman Catholic view that divorce means only separation 'from bed and board' with no entitlement to remarry was totally rejected. Bucer defended divorce with the right of remarriage for offences such as desertion but dismissed divorce for trivial reasons such as illness. However, he regarded adultery as a capital offence, punishable by death.[147] His more extreme proposal, that a couple should be permitted to divorce by mutual consent alone, in common with the ancient Judaic codes and Roman law, was later retracted in favour of adjudication by a third party. A consequence to Bucer's social model was that jurisdiction over marriage was properly the function of society through the magistrates, not the church (though in Strasbourg, for example, pastors were given consultative powers exercised through matrimonial courts).[148]

Bucer also advocated a reordering of the goods of marriage, in favour of love and mutuality as the prime purpose.

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[143] Cranmer, *Writings*, 115-6.
[144] Basil Hall, 'Martin Bucer in England', in D. F. Wright (ed.), *Martin Bucer Reforming Church and Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1994), 155-6.
[145] Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), 110.
[146] Hopf, *Bucer*, 109.
[147] Witte, *Sacrament*, 151; E. C. Whitaker, *Martin Bucer and the Book of Common Prayer*, Alcuin Club Collection, 55 (Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1974), 118; Hopf, *Bucer*, 108..
[148] Jean Rott, 'The Strasbourg Kirchepfleger and Parish Discipline: Theory and Practice', in Wright, *Bucer*, 122.

> Now the proper and ultimate end of marriage is not copulation, or children . . . but . . . the communion of all duties both divine and human, each to other with utmost benevolence and affection.[149]

Bucer took his inspiration from creation, that although subordinate to man, woman was created as his 'helpmate'. He recognised that many marriages were entered without an expectation of children, through age or incapacity, but the couple were still required to consummate their marriage and live as 'one flesh', as one person according to God's message.[150]

Although the Reform Commission, led by Archbishop Cranmer, presented many of the protestant ideas on marriage to Parliament in 1552, most of the recommendations were not accepted. Two major outcomes helped establish the authority of the Anglican Church. The first was the Book of Common Prayer, first introduced in 1549, revised in 1552 and 1662.[151] This set out the liturgies to be used, and overviews of canon law governing such issues as the proclamation of banns of marriage. However, the marriage liturgy was virtually indistinguishable from the former Roman Catholic liturgy (except that it was now in English). In particular, procreation remained the primary purpose of marriage. The second was the drawing up of the 1604 canons. These allowed some softening of the church's view on marriage such as permitting marriage for those under the age of twenty-one years with parental consent, better publicity given to forthcoming marriages and the beginnings of a licensing system for marriage (though there continued to be many irregular marriages, until stopped by the Hardwicke Act of 1753). The canons did not accept the Roman Catholic doctrine on the sacramental nature of marriage and permitted divorce, though this meant separation only with no right of remarriage (anyone remarrying could be prosecuted for bigamy). The view was that if the marital bond could not be healed at the human level, it could still be restored in the life hereafter.[152]

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[149] Bucer, *Reformation,* 110.
[150] Whitaker, *Bucer*, 120.
[151] Through the Book of Common Prayer, a marriage declared permanent and indissoluble, and therefore sacramental in quality may misinterpret Cranmer's translation from the Latin *volo*, 'I will', the response to the promise to be faithful 'so long as you both shall live'. In the English of the day, 'will' meant 'wish' or 'want to'. The response then becomes a statement of intent rather than a binding promise, more in line with betrothal than marriage itself. Thus, a fundamental difference between the Roman Catholic and Anglican view on marriage may have been obscured through linguistic changes over the years. This would appear to have led to the doctrine of indissolubility being misinterpreted and could have greatly altered the course of subsequent attitudes to divorce (Guy Deutscher, *The Unfolding of Language* (London: Heinemann, 2005), 155).
[152] *The Kings Book, or A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for Any Man* (London: SPCK, 1932), 64-5.

The commonwealth model was set out as a model for the creation of an orderly society. It was biblical insofar as it adhered to a hierarchical structure: the husband was head of the house and his wife was required to 'reverence her husband' and 'submit herself to him' and be moderate in her behaviour at all times. Nevertheless, the institution of marriage embodied love, faithfulness and mutuality from both spouses as well as Christian care for their children.[153] The commonwealth model was also political, and as such, reflected changing attitudes and through the laws on marriage, endeavoured to perpetuate the good of society.

3.4 Marriage, Betrothal and Cohabitation

The early Christian tradition continued to practice the ancient custom of betrothal. Betrothal was a characteristic of arranged marriage and signified agreement between the families over matters of dowry and gifts rather than a free consensual relationship as we understand marriage today. Betrothal is described several times in the Bible but as a tradition goes back to some of the earliest civilisations such as that in Mesopotamia.[154] As a marriage-like arrangement, betrothal served some very specific functions: principally, it gave protection to the woman from interference by third parties. Even though a betrothed couple will have exchanged promises *per verba de futuro* but had not their marriage vows, *per verba de presenti,* they were regarded as effectively married. Betrothed couples were committed to faithfulness and extra-marital relationships were regarded as adultery. Their relationship would normally not be consummated until their wedding, but if this happened during the betrothal period, then they were expected to marry immediately. Otherwise, there was some freedom to end the betrothal the terms of the marriage could not be agreed, both partners then being free to contract new relationships.

In modern times, betrothal has largely been supplanted by less formal engagement: as family involvement declines further, any vestige of betrothal is reduced to informal agreements and cohabitation. In the Western church, modern marriage liturgies conflate betrothal and marriage through the integration of the vows and promises, so that at the liturgical level, betrothal is no longer recognised as it was in former times.

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[153] Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of Household Gouernment* (London: Thomas Creede, 1598), 174-5, 186.
[154] Peter Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Marriage* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 11: See also Thatcher, *Lining Together*, 124-42.

However, the Orthodox Church still celebrates betrothal.[155] The central features are the invocation of God's blessing on the couple by the priest, the exchange of rings, and a homily that anticipates the vows of marriage.

The theological significance of betrothal has been long debated. Desiderius Erasmus, for example, argued that one of the consequences of the absence of betrothal in Christian marriage was the risk of marrying unsuitable partners.[156] He advocated a long betrothal during which time the partners would come to know each other better. He also advocated the resolution of legal impediments into eighteen categories, thereby producing a very methodical preparation for marriage. He saw this as one way of countering marriages made in haste without due regard to expectations of permanence. Erasmus' approach would be quite unacceptable to most couples today.

What is less certain is if a declaration of betrothal allowed a couple to live together. The tradition of the groom taking his bride to his home as part of the wedding celebration implies they lived with their families, but does not resolve the question of how they lived prior to the wedding.[157]

There have been recent attempts to reintroduce an updated betrothal liturgy to accommodate couples within the church family who wish to declare their commitment. Bishop Spong has devised a liturgy that enables a relationship to be

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[155] 'The Betrothal Service from the Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church', in Eugene F. Rogers Jr. (ed.), *Theology and Sexuality. Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 53-6.

[156] Erasmus, *Collected Works,* vol. 69, 235–241.

[157] Evidence for pre-marital cohabitation in the Bible is scant, but one obvious example is the nativity account in Matthew 1:18-25: Mary and Joseph were described as betrothed, not married. Morally, Mary is treated as a single woman, but culturally as though married: on the evidence of Mary's pregnancy and implied adultery, Joseph would have had to seek a divorce to end their relationship. Had a charge of adultery been maintained, Mary would have found it near impossible to marry subsequently within the ancient Judaic culture. This says nothing about whether or not they lived together as man and wife but the text is written as though they did and that they were regarded as effectively married. By the time they embarked on their journey to Bethlehem, Mary was virtually full-term, yet they travelled together freely and unimpeded, with all their friends and relatives. This too implies that during betrothal, cohabitation and sexual activity was normative. Likewise, when they sought accommodation, their status was not questioned. Their betrothal lasted at least nine months, up to the birth of Jesus: they were already betrothed when Jesus was conceived with no mention of an immediate wedding.

One suggestion is that betrothal periods of up to a year were commonplace: maybe this was to give all couples some chance of producing a first child and the woman proving her fertility? (see Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 65).

Other examples from the Old Testaments include Jacob who waited seven years (Gen 29:15-21) but in contrast, Tobias married Sara as soon as the terms of marriage were agreed (Tob 7:9-16).

blessed by the church.[158] There are provisos such as that the relationship should be both fully committed and exclusive, and that the couple intend to begin a lifestyle of living together. This circumvents the secretive element of cohabitation and enables their peers to relate fully to the partners as a couple. Spong's approach is to regard cohabitation as an end in itself: this is counter to the tradition whereby betrothal has always been regarded as part of a staged entry into full marriage, carrying with it only the promise to marry, reflected through betrothal liturgies extant up to the seventeenth century.[159]

Writing at a time when the church was beginning to notice cohabitation as a potential threat to marriage, A. R. Harcus suggested that the church should seek to recover the lost tradition of betrothal. His proposal was to reintroduce a betrothal liturgy to allow couples already preparing to marry to confirm their commitment to each other through a public commitment and exchange of rings as tokens of their love. In the homily, the couple are described as being effectively married.[160] For the Christian community, the resolution of the marriage liturgy back into betrothal and marriage may have attractions but the assumption is always that a traditional wedding will follow and the question of whether the couple live together during the betrothal period is not resolved.

Other examples of betrothal liturgies aimed at cohabiting couples may be found: David Scrase has proposed a 'Celebration of Commitment and Intent' as an alternative to the traditional route to marriage, to form a bridge between totally unregulated cohabitation and the ideal, binding relationahip that is marriage.[161] Commenting on the propensity for couples to live together before marriage and the rise in children born out of wedlock, Scrase comments:

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[158] John Selby Spong, *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 184.

A late fourteenth century ritual from the Cistercian Abbey of Barbeau decreed that a couple should wed within forty days (Searle and Stevenson, *Marriage Liturgy*, 156).

[159] Thatcher, *Modernity*, 125.

[160] A. R. Harcus, 'Betrothal and Marriage', *Expository Times* 109, no. 3 (1997), 73-75.

[161] Letter to author 8 June 1998.

> There seems to have been a return to the earlier pattern which led from relationship to betrothal, when living together until children were expected or born was the socially acceptable preamble to marriage. I believe that there is a need to provide today's couples with the chance to declare their commitment to one another.

The proposed liturgy is not marriage, but a statement of a couple's commitment. Nevertheless, it could sanction their living together (which they would probably do anyway) and make their relationship more acceptable within the church family.

Supporting these proposals, Michael Hare-Duke, a former Bishop of Edinburgh, reiterated two major provisions, to consider a need for a rite of passage for couples already committed to each other and to give couples the opportunity to confirm their love and commitment.[162] The liturgy would signal their intentions to marry and at the same time, enable them to be welcomed into the church family. A consequence would be to legitimise cohabitation before marriage, but at a deeper level, to recognise that marriage is a process not defined solely by the wedding. At a time when the wedding ceremony is often delayed for logistical reasons, the wedding has now, in many cases, become little more than a formal confirmation of what is already in place. The betrothal liturgy would commit a 'marriage before God', to be confirmed later. Although the couple have made known their intentions, they have not made any irrevocable promises that would require formal dissolution should they decide not to proceed and separate.

More recently, support for betrothal has come from Michael G. Lawler and Adrian Thatcher.[163] The value of betrothal is seen as a means of strengthening the couple's understanding of marriage and the responsibilities it brings. This failure to comprehend the full meaning of marriage is perceived to underlie problems of subsequent marital breakdown with resort to divorce as their solution.[164] Betrothal would be instituted at the first reading of the Banns: this effectively invites the congregation to approve of the relationship and though it may imply consent to the couple living together if they so desire at this stage, this is not explicit in the proposed betrothal liturgy. The form of betrothal rite quoted by Thatcher is that devised by

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[162] M. Hare Duke (letter to author 9 June 1998).
[163] Michael G. Lawler, 'Quaestio Disputata. Cohabitation: Past and Present Reality', *Theological Studies*, 65 (2004), 623-9; Thatcher, *Living Together*, Part 2; Thatcher, *Modernity*, 103-20.
[164] StC, 115.

Harcus, based on *The Alternative Service Book 1980* of the Church of England.[165] It would normally be inserted into the eucharist service at the Peace. The rite focuses on the couple's intention to marry according to the Christian understanding of marriage. They will declare publicly their intention to marry, supported by declarations of approval from the families. As in the Orthodox liturgy, rings are blessed and exchanged as sign of betrothal and commitment.

Betrothal, if reintroduced, may prompt the Banns to be read earlier, particularly if the couple are not already living together but intend to start cohabiting prior to their wedding. Betrothal would be available to committed Christians who wish to declare a firm commitment to marry: in practice, this implies that the date of the wedding is effectively fixed (by implication, in church, though this may not be a specific requirement). One argument is that the reintroduction of betrothal gives couples time to reflect on their forthcoming marriages and through this, assumes much more significance than engagement alone. In a church where the betrothal liturgy has been introduced, there has been a significant uptake amongst church-going couples preparing for marriage: the congregation is described as mostly young couples with children and this may have invoked a more receptive response than in urban congregations where age profiles are often skewed towards the upper end. This is a single example and there may be local factors that have precipitated its apparent success.

The move to reintroduce betrothal reflects a conscious recognition of the gulf between church weddings and the reality that is today's culture where there is open acceptance of physical love before marriage, giving couples the opportunity to focus on the quality of their relationship. However, there are reasons for supposing that betrothal, even in its updated form, would not necessarily bridge the gap between cohabitation and marriage since it does not confer any legal security on a relationship. My own proposal, discussed in Chapter 8, is for a new status of Committed Relationship to be celebrated either in church or through a civil ceremony. Committed Relationship envelops the principles of betrothal but attaches basic legal rights that would give couples some degree of security before becoming legally married.

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[165] Thatcher, *Living Together*, 276; A. R. Harcus, 'The Case for Betrothal', in Adrian Thatcher (ed.), *Celebrating Christian Marriage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 41-52.

A complimentary proposal is for a new marriage liturgy called 'Celebrated Relationship' that would offer a modern alternative to the traditional 'white wedding'.

3.5 Concluding Remarks - Contemporary Understanding of Christian Marriage

Marriage within the Christian tradition has taken its inspiration from the creation narratives through the teaching of Jesus, and although subject to different interpretations by subsequent traditions, has embraced certain core ethics for faithfulness, permanence and in the sacramental tradition, indissolubility. As the tradition has developed, it has helped give the Christian church its distinctive identity and ethos. The meaning of marriage within the Christian tradition continues to develop, partly in response to changing social attitudes, but also with greater insights into biblical understanding. In a contemporary context, marriage may be resolved into three components, the conjugal relationship, the marital bond (itself subdivided into a sacramental and covenantal understanding), and the wedding itself.

3.5.1 The Conjugal Relationship

A heterosexual, conjugal relationship has been at the centre of human behaviour since creation, as it is fundamental to marriage. The Christian understanding is that the conjugal bond embodies love and the selfless mutual support that couples give to each other, described through the ethics of marriage interpreted from Jesus teaching. The conjugal relationship traditionally provides for procreation: in previous cultures, this has usually been central to marriage, if not its main purpose. These ethics are expressed through the 'goods of marriage', first propounded by Augustine, since when they have been enshrined in the marriage liturgy. It is only in recent years that the Christian tradition has begun to place procreation secondary to the formation of a mutually loving and supporting bond.

In the context of cohabitation, many cohabiting couples lead lifestyles that are outwardly and emotionally almost indistinguishable from marriage. This applies whether the couple are cohabiting prior to marrying or for its own sake, embarking on what they anticipate will be a long-term, if not permanent relationship. Many of these relationships may have started without any clear concept of the potential outcome. An unmarried couple with a family may be seen to be living outside the Christian ideal

for children to be nurtured within marriage, particularly when pregnancy may be a precipitating factor causing many relationships to fail. Nevertheless, the congregation survey raised the view that unmarried couples raising a family and exercising responsibility warrant a degree of respect. In assuming a marriage-like mantle, they are, in effect, taking on-board the ethics of marriage: their relationship is, by definition, informal, but may be regarded as conjugal in nature.

Augustine's goods of marriage define the purposes of marriage and in that sense, what marriage is all about. However, when cohabitation assumes marriage-like qualities, and, indeed, the phrase 'married in all but name' is attributed to such couples, then they may aspire to goods in their own relationship that are similar to if not identical to Augustine's pronouncements on marriage. At this level, it is clear that there are what may be described as 'goods of cohabitation' that distinguish long-term relationships from other short-term cohabitation. The assumption here is that a long-term, stable relationship will be sustained by a deep emotional attachment unlike short-term relationships where there may be a greater element of expediency.

3.5.2 The Marital Bond

The marital bond is the formal statement of the conjugal relationship. It signifies the change in intention brought out through the definitions given in Chapter 1 from stability to permanence in a relationship. The Christian understanding of the marital bond, at least in this country, resolves into two main traditions, sacramental, which is that of the Roman Catholic Church and some clergy in other churches, mainly Anglican, and the covenantal tradition of the Protestant churches.

3.5.2.1 The Marital Bond in the Sacramental Tradition

The sacramental tradition of marriage has already been described insofar as it relates to the teaching of Jesus and interpretation by the early church. However, as the tradition moves on, there is a current awareness amongst some Catholic theologians that social change and ideas developed during the twentieth century challenge traditional Biblical interpretations underlying statements in the Catechism.[166] On this

[166] Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Marriage', in Michael J. Walsh (ed.), *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffry Chapman, 1994), 319.

view, the interpretation of marriage within the Catechism rests more on tradition than Biblical exegesis:

> the Catechism's insistence that the teaching on the sacramentality of all marriages has been part of Christian belief from the New Testament onward, and that even creation as presented in Genesis clearly requires monogamy and indissolubility, is fallacious.[167]

Contemporary Roman Catholic understanding of the marital relationship itself is that for many couples, marriage has become inter-personal and not necessarily procreative. The status of women begins to be recognised in *Gaudium et spes* which speaks of marriage as a covenant for mutual help and service to which the spouses give their consent. Mutual self-giving and service to each other exemplify conjugal love as expressed through the marital act that is there for the 'good of the whole person'.[168] This represents a move away from the patriarchal relationship derived through scripture, to give equality to both spouses. This also creates a tension since within this expression of conjugal love, there is a call for responsible parenthood, albeit to be exercised through natural means, affirmed by John Paul II in *Familiaris consortio*.[169] There are other contemporary issues if the Roman Catholic Church is to reach out to other groups: catholics in mixed marriages, single persons who may be cohabiting, infertile couples and those divorced and remarried.

Nevertheless, the sacramental tradition adheres strongly to our understanding of God's intention for humankind as declared through creation. The sacramental model is universal for all baptised persons marrying in the Roman Catholic Church. However, there is also a view that any marriage of two baptised persons, whether or not they practice the faith is by definition sacramental (and therefore, indissoluble). This prompts Lisa Cahill to question the doctrine on indissolubility in marriage.[170] Such issues are not yet resolved, but contrast this with the attitudes of many Protestants, which is to use pastoral experience to challenge traditional values.

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[167] Cahill, 'Marriage', 328.
[168] *Gaudium et spes*, para. 49.
[169] Thielicke, *Ethics*, 128, n. 10; Cahill, 'Marriage', 322.
[170] Cahill, 'Marriage', 321.

3.5.2.2 The Marital Bond in the Protestant Tradition

In arguing against marriage as a sacrament, two important factors emerged: firstly, the human institution of marriage continuously falls short of God's intention for humankind as declared through creation. Secondly, there is a need to distinguish between civil marriage as a sign of social order and Christian marriage with its message of salvation and eschatological expectations.[171] This gives a sense of 'moving on' that takes a relationship from being a valid marriage to a fully covenantal marriage and finally towards a sacramental relationship, a theme that will be developed below.

Marriage in the Reformed tradition became governed by covenant, a sacred agreement that interleaves contract and canon law: Paul himself (1 Cor 7:3-5) described a person's obligations within a marriage and provided a basis for establishing a marriage as a covenant. Four discrete elements that characterise a covenant may be identified:-

> i) an undertaking of committed faithfulness made by one party to another (or by both to each other),
> ii) the acceptance of that undertaking by the other party,
> iii) public knowledge of such an undertaking and its acceptance,

and

> iv) growth of a personal relationship based on, and expressive of such a commitment.[172]

This statement of covenant contains no reference to gender but is a marriage between equals in which neither party is required to promise any more or less than the other. Both partners have equal status within the covenant.[173] A consequence is that obligations within marriage might cease when no longer required for this purpose.[174] Implicit in this is the freedom to divorce and remarry, moving even towards a

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[171] Thatcher, *Marriage,* 93.
[172] Atkinson, *Have and to Hold,* 134.
[173] This appears contrary to the view of Barth and others that man was created as head over woman, leading him to argue for a natural hierarchy within marriage (Barth, *Dogmatics,* III, 1, 205).
[174] This is not good news for post-menopausal women or other couples who are unable to conceive and fulfil the obligation for children and family.

contractual marriage bond.[175] A more far reaching argument is that the church would not have automatic right of control over marriage: those who wished to adhere to biblical norms would be free to do so, but there would also be freedom to marry outside of the church. A valid marriage would be established in both cases but the Christian interpretation of marriage is different.

The model for a covenantal marital bond does not presume that a full covenantal relationship is necessarily established at the start of marriage, but regards marriage as one that is continually developing. A major factor is the supplanting of eros by agape, the ability to lose self-centeredness in favour of sacrificial love. This enables the biological relationship to grow into one in accord with the first family of God (this concept of growth helps underpin the model for cohabitation and marriage linked through friendship, developed in Chapter 7). Certainly, the covenantal tradition does not require a marriage to be truly sacramental from the point at which vows are exchanged but that there is no will on the part of the spouses to separate. Indissolubility comes from within the relationship and cannot be imposed by outside authority.[176]

In the Anglican tradition, the 1928 revision to the Book of Common Prayer, to be more fully developed in the ASB published in 1980, Bucer's understanding for the re-ordering of the goods of marriage came to fruition, giving support for the covenantal argument. The marriage liturgy now gives prominence to mutual help and comfort as the prime purpose of marriage. The reasoning adopted was that this was identified as the one certain lifelong need if marriage is to achieve its goal of permanence: a consequence is to make marriage much more inclusive towards those for who are unable or choose not to have children. In the context of families, avoidance of the word 'procreation' circumvents the problem where many couples create their family

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[175] The prohibition on remarriage in the 1604 canons provoked vigorous debate throughout the seventeenth century. An influential protagonist in the C17 for the facility for divorce with remarriage was Milton (though his views may have been influenced by his personal experience in that his wife left him after a very short marriage, leaving no grounds for annulment). Whatever the reason, he argued that to avoid damage to the commonwealth of family and society, there should be provision for failed marriages to be dissolved and reconstituted (see Witte, *Sacrament*, 183). He effectively deconstructed the traditional Christian argument for prohibition on divorce and remarriage on grounds that earthly practices may emulate but are not bound by Biblical ideals. Instead he argued that a universal natural law of marriage including an understanding of divorce based on the Hebrew law should apply, recognising that marriage often falls short of the Creationist intention and may never achieve the sacramental quality demanded of traditional church teaching.

[176] It may also be argued that since no one is without sin, sacramental marriage free from all sin and a channel for God's grace can never become a reality, save after death.

through adoption or fertility and other treatments to enable them to start a family. Thus the ASB embodies a degree of inclusiveness not seen in previous liturgies.[177]

The state now has total legal control of marriage and lays down certain minimum requirements to be satisfied. This invokes a mechanistic, contractual interpretation of marriage without any anticipation of how a relationship should develop. Celebrating marriage as a covenant, declared before God, gives to the marriage bond, the potential to move forward. As Atkinson has resolved the covenant into four elements, so may each of these develop, allowing the marital bond to be transformed from a legal declaration of intent through an exchange of promises into a fulfilled, committed, fully covenantal relationship, in effect a sacramental relationship.

The reality, though, is that many marriages fail to grow, ending in separation or divorce and this is part of the understanding of covenant: if it has been ill-founded, then it is unlikely to achieve fulfilment. This is important to the discussion on cohabitation: if a cohabiting relationship is currently stable, then there will be some level of embryonic covenant between the partners: this may not be all four elements of the covenant, but sufficient for them to feel bonded. They will accept the need for faithfulness. The third element is least likely to be fulfilled, but if the partners develop aspirations towards getting married, then they will reach a point where they do need to make known in public the covenant that exists between them. It is the fourth element that demands the space and will of the partners to be allowed to grow. Thus, just as friendship may reflect the quality of a relationship in terms of love and commitment, so may our understanding of covenant describe the total development of the relational bond.

3.5.3 The Wedding

For many couples, the wedding itself has lost some of its significance in the sense that they are already living in a marriage-like relationship and have resolved the essentials of house and home. The church still places its emphasis on marriage, but for many couples, the quality of their relationship is their first priority. The wedding is the time

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[177] Church of England, Central Board of Finance, *The Alternative Service Book 1980* (London: SPCK, 1980), 288; R. C. D. Jasper and Paul F. Bradshaw, *A Companion to The Alternative Service Book* (London: SPCK, 1986), 382.

when they confirm legally and publicly what is already in place, their 'emotional marriage'. The event signals the party-time for family and friends and a joint family celebration. Many couples will feel they are already 'married' and the wedding represents the completion of their relationship, giving them certain legal rights and privileges.

Within this completion, there are two important aspects that are easily lost, but which theologically, help define the marriage. Firstly, the wedding generates and confirms their kinship relationships. This establishes their genealogy and their identity within their family structure, effectively a family time-line. Vows and promises may be exchanged formally or informally at any time (this will become more evident in Chapter 5): whenever they are made, they remain personal to the couple. My own view is that the wedding, uniquely, establishes kinship: the reception and partying that is part of the wedding still celebrates the coming together of the two families. It is in this respect that the wedding is the appropriate time for celebration.[178] Kinship is not established through cohabitation, irrespective of whether or not one takes some responsibility for their partner's family members on an informal or social basis. This is an argument against any formal recognition of cohabitation as marriage, to be discussed in Chapter 8. Secondly the wedding brings a couple's relationship into the full knowledge of the community. This further contributes to their identity as a couple. For the Christian (possibly also for other religious faiths, though this has not been explored), the wedding has a third function: it enables a couple to bring their relationship before God in order to acknowledge their understanding of the marital bond and seek God's blessing on this understanding. Christian marriage demands a different mentality to the contractual nature of the civil wedding: the marriage is integral to the church family and within a covenantal understanding of marriage, is a declaration of the couple's intention to conduct their marriage according to the Christian ethics interpreted through Jesus' teaching. Though not always achieved, the nature of the wedding separates the Christian understanding from marriage as a legal entity, but both forms clearly separate marriage from marriage-like relationships such as cohabitation.

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[178] In the clergy survey, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.5.2, one of the objections to the reintroduction of betrothal was confusion over when to have the family celebration.

Chapter 4

Clergy Survey: Attitudes to Cohabitation and Marriage

In the previous chapter, I have endeavoured to show how the marriage tradition has developed through continuous reinterpretation of Jesus' teaching in response to differing cultural environments and influences. In recent times, inter-personal attitudes have changed: the doctrine and tradition of the church is no longer accepted without question, and this has led to radical lifestyle changes. There are two particular challenges to the established order to be considered here. Firstly, there is cohabitation that many see as the effective privatisation of marriage. Secondly, those who do marry are increasingly likely to do so in a civil rather than religious ceremony: when, for example, there are attractive venues offering a complete range of facilities from the wedding to reception and in many instances, a bridal chamber, this trend may be very difficult to arrest. These developments are supported by the statistics presented in Chapter 2 and both are taking marriage and marriage-like relationships further away from the church as a traditional source of wisdom and experience. There may be a need for the stance of the church to change, though the reports outlined in Chapter 1 suggest that it continues to take a very conservative approach.

The formal reports do not necessarily reflect the impact of cohabitation together with the swing towards civil marriage on churches at a local level: this is explored through two surveys I have conducted of clergy and congregations representing all the main denominations in my local area of Harrogate.[1] Other than the survey of Lynda Le Tissier, highlighted in Chapter 1, I am not aware of any other comparable survey on attitudes to cohabitation and certainly not in Harrogate. The results of the clergy survey are reported in this chapter, the corresponding congregation survey in Chapter 5. Both have contributed to the theological baseline from which cohabitation is considered.

The purpose and nature of the surveys has been outlined in Chapter 1. In this chapter, the methodology is expanded to explain the presentation and analyses of the clergy

[1] The choice of Harrogate was made for logistical reasons: the surveys required a major effort that I serviced through my own resources.

survey. This is followed by a summary of the numerical responses to the questionnaire together with selected additional written and verbal comments submitted or made during the interviews. The clergy survey, entitled 'Cohabitation and Pastoral Care', focused on the pastoral implications of cohabitation and how the church is reacting to its emergence as a normative lifestyle against the background of the marriage tradition. The clergy, as local arbiters of Christian ethics, are required to preach the doctrines and Biblical interpretation of their particular denomination and this influences their pastoral approach accordingly. However, through their pastoral ministry, they will have to contend with social issues that are strictly at variance with their teaching, of which cohabitation may be one.

4.1 Clergy Survey Logistics

An initial approach in person or by telephone to obtain their agreement to participate in the exercise was followed up by a postal questionnaire to each participant followed-up by short 'interviews' to explore their responses and related issues.

The questionnaire is reproduced in full in Appendix II. The questionnaire itself is divided into four main sections: the first section looks at cohabitation as a lifestyle, Section 2 focuses on the interaction between cohabitation and church marriage and Section 3 looks at the effect of cohabitation on church life. Each of these sections was preceded by a rubric, followed by a series of questions with opportunities to expand their opinions through written comments. Section 4 is left open with the intention of inviting general comments and to raise issues or particular concerns not already covered.

4.1.1 Response Rates

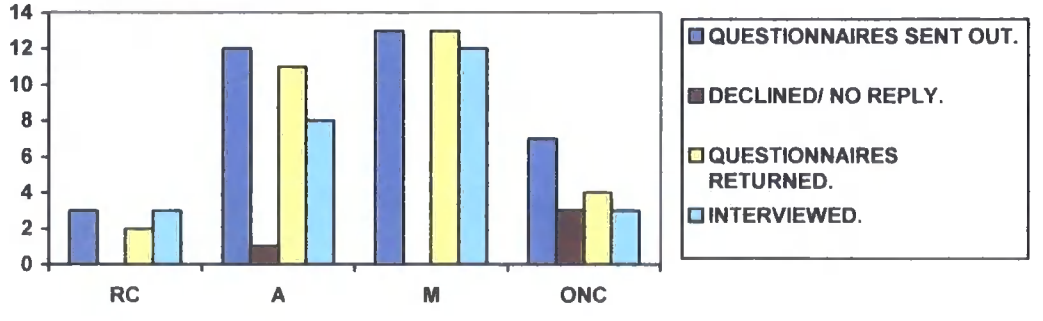
Of the thirty-six clergy approached, thirty-two responded with representation from all the main Christian denominational groups in the area, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Other Non-Conformist. This latter category includes URC, Baptist and Evangelical Church clergy: being few in number, these have been grouped together. All except the leaders of the Evangelical Churches are formally ordained: the Evangelical Church Pastors or Leaders would probably be equivalent to lay preachers in the Methodist Church, or Readers in the Anglican Church, authorised to lead

worship but not, for example, administer Holy Communion. Non-ordained lay preachers, readers, and others would ordinarily be invited to respond through the Congregation Survey. A few of the participating clergy are retired, though still active in clerical and pastoral activities. In summary, there were responses from three Roman Catholic priests, though one responded through interview alone. Of the fourteen Anglican clergy approached, all but one were able to respond within the time-frame set for the exercise, though three declined to be interviewed and one responded by interview only. The fourteen Methodist ministers included two who had volunteered to take part in a 'pilot' exercise: a further two declined interviews. Of the six 'Other Non-Conformist' ministers/pastors invited, four responded.

The sample included three clergy from outside Harrogate, invited to participate on the basis that they have had significant connections with Harrogate during their ministry. A further two external contributors known to myself were able to contribute some very pertinent comments but are not included in the results analysis since they have no particular connection with Harrogate.

A majority agreed to be interviewed and of those who declined, it was usually because of other work-related pressures. All comments quoted in this thesis are coded as to preserve their anonymity, referred to only by their denominational group and/or theological tradition. All other personal details have been suppressed.

The overall response is summarised in the following bar chart :-[2]



[2] In the graphical presentations, the following abbreviations are used :-

Denomination:	RC	Roman Catholic
	A	Anglican
	M	Methodist
	ONC	Other Non-Conformist (includes Baptist, URC and Evangelical)

In terms of research surveys, the sample was neither large enough nor sufficiently representative of any but a small microcosm of the Christian church to attribute statistical significance to the results. The intention was strictly to present a qualitative review of attitudes amongst local clergy within their pastoral role. For this reason, no attempt has been made to normalise the data since this would risk misinterpretation, giving the figures a statistical significance that cannot be justified.

4.1.2 Data Analysis and Presentation

The results of the clergy survey are presented numerically in Appendix IV. The data from both questionnaires have been entered on to SPSS databases.[3] Responses to the questions were required in one of two forms: firstly, 'YES', 'NO', or 'SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES', with an invitation to expand their responses through written comments. Alternatively, the level of agreement with given statements was required to be stated, circling AS, A NC, D, DS denoting 'AGREE STRONGLY', 'AGREE', 'NOT CERTAIN', 'DISAGREE' or 'DISAGREE STRONGLY'. This latter format conforms to a form of Liggett survey often used in sociological questionnaires.[4]

Inevitably, not all respondents replied to every question, either because an issue was outside their level of experience or did not apply to their particular circumstances and felt unable to respond. A specific example would be questions on betrothal, a concept not always well understood. In a few cases, respondents did not understand the questions! Where questions have not been answered, these are entered into the database as 'Missing Values' and are excluded from the analyses. This accounts for the inconsistencies in sample sizes relating to each question.

The results in Appendix IV, usie bar charts to show simple numbers of responses to the various questions, with a common colour code according to the level of agreement

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[3] Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Andy Field, *Discovering Statistics. Using SPSS for Windows* (London: Sage Publications, 2000)).
[4] John Liggett and Raymond Cochrane, *Exercises in Social Science* (London: Constable, 1968).

to facilitate easy comparison.[5] There is a basic chart to give the total response to each question: where there is a diversity of opinion, the results are re-plotted according the axes of the profile. For the Clergy Survey, these are Denomination Group and Theological Tradition. To simplify the presentations, abbreviations are used to define the parameters used, as well as responses to the questions.[6]

The total sample in the clergy survey was too small and limited in area to yield statistically significant results. Therefore, all results are plotted as simple counts and not normalised to give percentages. However, fractional responses are quoted in the discussions below, for example, in the analysis of the Clergy Survey, the statement '(8/11) Methodists' would signify eight out of eleven Methodist clergy responding to a particular question: this enables the reader to form an opinion of the strength of feeling locally without implying that the result represents 73% of **all** Methodist clergy. Despite this caveat, the results are regarded as a valid statement of the attitudes of the Christian churches in Harrogate and within the scope of this thesis there is confidence in the numerical and reflective data presented.

The appropriate sections from the questionnaire corresponding to the discussions are reproduced in the form 'Is cohabitation without an intention to marry an acceptable alternative to marriage?' (**1.1**). The questions are not treated sequentially in order to preserve the flow of the discussion and introduce correspondence with the

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[5] Level of Agreement

There are two forms of response, shown with the code and colour used in the bar charts:-

Response Style 1:	Agree Strongly	AS	dark red
	Agree	A	medium red
	Not Certain	NC	grey
	Disagree	D	medium blue
	Disagree Strongly	DS	dark blue
Response Style 2:	Yes	Y	dark red
	Sometimes	S	grey
	No	N	dark blue

[6] Theological Tradition – Clergy Survey

C	Conservative (this category includes Roman Catholics and other clergy, mainly Anglican, who declare their tradition to be aligned with their church's teaching).
L	Liberal.
LE	Liberal/Evangelical.
E	Evangelical.

congregation survey discussed in Chapter 5. Also, some questions comprising short, multiple statements are incorporated into the text where this is more appropriate.

Quotations in the commentary below are italicised, and referenced in such a way as to respect respondents' confidentiality.[7] The written and verbal comments are subject to editing to remove superfluous interjections, unnecessary text, and correct obvious grammatical errors. Some stylistic editing has been necessary to avoid the respondent being identified. All editing has been sympathetic to the intention and meaning of the comments. Inevitably, there were many more responses than could be included, and therefore those quoted are to be regarded as typical unless it is made clear their comment is unique.

The relatively recent emergence of cohabitation as a normative lifestyle presents a challenge for clergy, particularly within their pastoral role. As with many new situations, *there is a tendency for the church to have a natural inertia or conservatism that sometimes does need a push from wider trends.*[8] Chapters 4 and 5 constitutes part of that 'push', in spite of the comment, *I don't see cohabitation as ideal, but not something to get upset about*![9]

4.2 Clergy Survey Results

Whatever their views on cohabitation, all clergy affirmed the primacy of marriage in response to the statement 'Marriage is primarily a commitment to mutuality and faithfulness' (**1.13**). Verbal responses included: *marriage is a gift from God for all people. Some of us enter it as Christians and I think that gives us additional resource, and a vision and depth of life in all its fullness, not available without faith.*[10] *Marriage is very deeply built in to the ordering of relationship between a man and a woman, a sexual relationship within the context of marriage is a profoundly powerful way to reach your human potential.*[11]

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[7] A typical reference would be C019: Methodist/Evangelical. The number refers to my SPSS database entry, followed by the denomination and theological tradition of the particular respondent.
[8] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[9] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[10] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[11] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical. A similar comment was made by C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.

At the same time, the Christian tradition on marriage is perceived to be widely challenged through the readiness of couples to cohabit, creating theological tensions within the church: They don't see *the greatness of marriage, they see something far less, they are just following the culture; all they can see is living together, which is inadequate for living in the faith and to achieve God's blessing.*[12] Views such as this are not confined to the Roman Catholic Church: *cohabiting couples come to church, come to communion, searching for a Christian faith and sometimes that creates a state of tension within their relationship because they are not doing what the faith requires.*[13]

Some liberal clergy, particularly within the Methodist church, may be inclined to greater social tolerance: *I still hold very strongly to the belief that marriage is not only viable but also the best life-style available. That does not mean that I don't welcome people who are co-habiting, but marriage needs to be upheld as an ideal and celebrated as a valid and viable life-style.*[14] And *in a society where morals are still based on Christian principles, the ideal still is Christian marriage. There seems to be some evidence that Christian marriages are more stable than relationships of cohabiting couples.*[15]

4.2.1 Cohabitation and Lifestyle

About one third (12/30) of the sample disagreed when asked 'Is cohabitation without an intention to marry an acceptable alternative to marriage?' (**1.1**). Within this figure, there are (3/11) Anglican and (5/15) Methodist clergy alongside (2/3) of Roman Catholic and (2/3) ONC clergy, mostly from the Conservative and Evangelical traditions.[16] Within each denominational group, some clergy will '**sometimes**' accept cohabitation as a lifestyle but view it as a pastoral issue, such as when there are psychological problems: *a woman I know ... has had the experience of a truly awful parental marriage that has resulted in a fear of failure. She has a partner, two*

[12] C003: Roman Catholic.
[13] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[14] C022: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[15] C018: Methodist/Evangelical.
[16] ONC: Other Non-Conformist, includes Baptist, URC and Evangelical Church clergy or pastors.

children but no formal commitment.[17] Liberal Anglican and Methodist clergy are more inclined to accept cohabitation if that is how the couple chooses to live.

There were a few clergy (4/30) from all denominations, notably Liberal elements in the Anglican and Methodist churches willing to accept that there may be particular circumstances where cohabitation is admissible as a lifestyle choice (this does not imply they would not prefer couples to be married). *We have to live with reality. The ideal is that they marry, and my hope is that when they live together they will, confirming the life they have been sharing together.*[18] Two Anglicans respondents focussed on the psychology and integrity of the relationship, as in *I believe that there are some people who are more likely to sustain all that Christian marriage is about if they have NOT tied themselves by a binding commitment.*[19] Part of this may be the result of a need to reconcile previous experiences of marriage: *their first marriage has broken down, they don't want to get hurt again. If one wants to get married but the other won't, they just don't know what to do.*[20] Amongst those in long-term cohabiting relationships, it is found that *many within the church are survivors of damaging relationships in a previous marriage or childhood. Forcing them into marriage before they are ready is unacceptable. Nor is it acceptable to deny them close companionships.*[21] It is not unknown for couples to have a fear of the wedding itself: *people don't mind being married but don't want the hassle of a wedding, because they can't afford it or don't want to be the centre of attention. It can be scary having to make promises before other people.*[22]

When cohabitation is accompanied by a commitment to marry, the level of rejection fell from (10/29) to (4/29), mostly from evangelicals. Acceptance came from Anglicans and Methodists, with Roman Catholic and Evangelical clergy remaining cautious when asked 'Is cohabitation accompanied by a commitment to marry acceptable?' (**1.2**:). For couples anticipating marriage, the practicalities and economics of housing etc. were appreciated, and that almost dictates that a couple

[17] C030: ONC/Evangelical.
[18] C018: Methodist/Evangelical.
[19] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[20] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[21] C022: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[22] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.

need to live together: *if people plan to marry I can accept this but not if they have no intention to make a commitment.*[23]

A Roman Catholic priest summarised what he saw as the difference between marriage and cohabitation, reflecting on a growing tension within the church: *Cohabitation brings marriage down to a consumerist level, reduces it to the lowest common denominator. The great mystery and human quality of friendship are elements we need to recover.*[24] The observation is that *they are prepared to settle for what is good even though they could achieve something even better.*[25]

The conversations raised several issues that have had to be addressed through pastoral ministry.

Firstly, there is suspicion over the motives to cohabit: *I accept cohabitation if the arrangement is more likely to bring about a life-long commitment than the alternatives; I suspect this to be much less often than is supposed.*[26] *I haven't come across couples getting married in church without a clear determination that this is going to work, it's going to be life-long and they want to grow old together.*[27] An Evangelical Methodist declared: *In terms of my ethics and theology, I don't believe cohabiting is right in any circumstances though I have to say it's more and more difficult to hold that position in terms of my practice within the church.*[28] Another, a Liberal, reflecting on his personal experience, asked the question *why did not my generation cohabit? The same emotional pressures were on us as are on couples now. I often say to couples although it is a pressure to wait, there is a glory in the waiting: the whole ethos of their relationship is 'we want it now'; but they lose a bit of the special 'magic'.*[29] The definition of what is marriage is effectively broadened, extending the qualification 'outside of marriage': *a couple may consider they are effectively married, even if it is not yet legalised.*[30]

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[23] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[24] C003: Roman Catholic.
[25] C002: Roman Catholic.
[26] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[27] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[28] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[29] C025: Methodist/Liberal-Mainstream.
[30] C030: ONC/Mainstream.

Secondly, a strong motivation to marry relates to family: *I think it is often the desire to start a family that gives the impetus to marry and have the relationship formalised.*[31]

Thirdly, clergy are inclined to question whether cohabitation is a better means of getting to know each other. Clergy interaction with most couples is when they present themselves for marriage. Sometimes, the course of their relationship may be questioned: *if a couple meet, jump into bed together and want to get married, I would say that is very foolish. Get to know one another, spend time together, but don't come to me within three months of meeting to get married.*[32] A sign of changing attitudes came when a mainstream Anglican commented on a couple who hadn't lived together: *how on earth have they managed to get to know each other and be confident their marriage is going to survive?*[33]

If a couple have cohabited for a long time, they may be asked why they are not already married: *if they've lived together and had a family, they are in their own minds, married. They haven't made the commitment, yet it just requires one small step and they can have the whole thing. Cohabitation is always testing things out, not building a relationship. Marriage is from the start, a commitment to the other person.*[34] Nevertheless, clergy are prepared to respect a couple genuinely in a long-term relationship *based on love and faithfulness, not merely convenience.*[35] *A couple who are living faithfully and have been together for many, many years, if not all their lives, have a lot that is worthy. What I look for is quality of relationship.*[36] An important factor in exercising judgement is whether or not the partners are ordinarily free to marry, free of legal impediments and free within the eyes of their church: *I know of a couple from a time when one partner could not get a divorce; the man took off with another woman, had children and lived together for 40 years. You cannot condemn them. They have an extremely happy life and you would have to regard them in many ways as being married.*[37]

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[31] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[32] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[33] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[34] C003: Roman Catholic.
[35] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[36] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[37] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.

This naturally leads to discussions on commitment and the whole nature of relationship and why a long-term commitment is not forthcoming.

4.2.1.1 Cohabitation and Commitment

One of the central issues for clergy is that of commitment, how it is demonstrated and then lived out through the relationship. Without reference as to whether or not a couple are married, there is a universal view that in spite of the changes in society, the feeling remains that to make a lifetime commitment to one's partner is a realistic aspiration, with (18/29) disagreeing in response to 'It is unrealistic to expect a lifetime relationship in the 21st century?' (**1.4**).

The question is whether cohabitation can embody commitment in the same way as marriage. *There are two parts to marriage, the legal bit that everybody has to fulfil, but then there's the Christian commitment expressed through the vows. Cohabitation embodies the same sort of commitments we make in marriage but it is very incomplete, not the one-flesh union we accept in Christian marriage. A lot of couples cohabit as two people whose lives overlap but are not joined together in the same way.*[38] At a deeper level, *I believe that commitment is Biblical, what we are designed for. At the human level, we commit, because we want this to work.*[39] An Evangelical Anglican comments that *our expectation of Christians should be different to non-Christians.*[40] This opens up questions on church marriage, discussed in 6.3, supported by statements such as *I prefer to see a single relationship that develops into Christian marriage.*[41]

To argue the case for commitment alone says nothing about being married. Reactions vary across the denominations: for example, from a liberal respondent, *it seems to me that if they are living together in a sexual relationship, they would have made some commitment, it's just not publicly stated: in a moral and ethical sense, they are married and want this to work.*[42] The suspicion is that cohabitation reflects insecurity

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[38] C027: Methodist/Liberal/Radical.
[39] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[40] C012: Anglican/Evangelical.
[41] C026: Methodist/Liberal/Radical.
[42] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical (C006: Anglican/Mainstream expressed a similar view).

in their relationship: *If they cannot commit to marriage, maybe they have never really explored what marriage means. It has been so much a part of our culture we have never considered the need to explain it. Both on the personal and social level I understand people who say, why do we need to be married?*[43]

A factor that underpins commitment is that of intent: *what is your relationship really like that you need a get-out clause, is it as happy and stable as you are making out?*[44] Attitudes such as this are seen as *a reflection on society and many areas of life. People are reluctant to make a commitment; they look at society but do not see the 'big picture', they pick and choose what they want to accept.*[45] The rising incidence of cohabitation is seen against a growing trend towards informality in all aspects of living and a *fantasy of freedom to choose. I think people have rebelled against the strictures we put on things, you want to do your own thing, part of the culture. What am I actually called to do in life easily gets submerged.*[46]

Clergy find little confidence that a couple has necessarily made a commitment to each other in the sense of a promise for life *before* (my emphasis) starting to live together, as they would if getting engaged to be married: *Commitment is not something I would sense is a big part of a young person's culture today.*[47] When couples are approaching marriage *I do believe, their intention is that it be life-long. There is a need to take intention seriously and show grace where needed.*[48]

Strength of commitment is very difficult to measure, particularly when a couple live in an open-ended relationship. One obvious factor is how long the couple have known each other, in particular, *the length of their relationship before moving in together as well as the number of partners before the current relationship.*[49] Also, *is the relationship conducted with mutual respect and care?*[50] This focuses on the potential for the partners to sustain a stable relationship and allow it to grow. There is no universal answer and clergy were reluctant to put a time span on a relationship before

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[43] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[44] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[45] C029: ONC/Evangelical.
[46] C003: Roman Catholic (C026: Methodist/Liberal expressed a similar view).
[47] C003: Roman Catholic.
[48] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.
[49] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[50] C002: Roman Catholic (C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic expressed a similar view).

it could be accepted as 'permanent'.[51] Much depended on the couple concerned, but a two to three year time span was suggested by one respondent.[52] Older people may be found to commit much more readily.[53] Problems arise when the life-long intention is not fulfilled: *people don't enter seriously into cohabitation with the intention of it being short term. I have not met anyone who has come to marriage and said if it doesn't work, we can always get divorced. There is usually a long-term intention.*[54]

Several clergy wanted to know how and when commitment develops; *there is some level of commitment when you start to go out together. How or when does the commitment change?*[55] A major concern is the way cohabitation has fostered 'drift-in' relationships outside any formal framework, without couples really considering the implications: *cohabitation can be vague and casual, with blurred edges. Couples wander into cohabitation without really making a proper decision.*[56] This generates attitudes such as *we will get married when we know each other well enough. They are willing to take on the commitment for a joint mortgage but not to express commitment to one another. Couples can be very defensive of their situation and unwilling to reflect upon it.*[57]

The concept of courtship as opposed to the perception that a couple don't get to know each other until they are living together is important: one respondent recalled a comment from his congregation, *I missed out on courtship, the gentle building up of a relationship. We hardly knew each other. I became pregnant so we got together.*[58] Cohabitation as part of the process of getting to know one's partner was not addressed in the questionnaire (though it appears later in the Congregation Survey): *when a majority of couples are already cohabiting we appear to have completely lost any notion of courting. With pre-marital intercourse the whole mating process is changed. I find it is very valuable in terms of my own relationship with my wife that through our traditional courtship, friendship developed into the much deeper friendship needed in marriage. If and when the sexual side of our marriage declines, there is still good reason for you to get on together. Before we got married, I recall one*

[51] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[52] C022: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[53] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[54] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[55] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[56] C026: Methodist/Liberal/Radical.
[57] C006: Anglican/Mainstream (C029: ONC/Evangelical expressed a similar view).
[58] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.

person who wouldn't believe we were not cohabiting because surely we wanted to see if we were sexually compatible.[59] This means that invariably, *couples* ***start*** *without the distance of a courtship to explain their feelings. Living together, you are in each other's space, restricting each other's development. There's no time to get to know each other properly before you decide to come together. Courtship provides a deeper understanding of who you are.*[60] The new Methodist marriage service says *'Are you free to marry'? In the preamble, there is a description of marriage as companionship, love, and wholeness of their life together, helping each other grow. Maybe those who live together do that and find there is something special, but cohabitation says to me that people can't be bothered to wait for marriage.*[61]

A factor that does emerge is that some couples may be reluctant to make a commitment they are not confident they can fulfil, and this comes back to the psychological barrier experienced by some couples or partners discussed above. *They don't want to commit for various reasons. They have got the practical commitments, what they haven't got is the public declaration of permanence.*[62] Conversely, *cohabiting couples maybe don't see the security marriage can give to a relationship: this lack of understanding of marriage and its benefits means we can't accept the responsibilities of commitment.*[63] Whatever commitments and responsibilities are built into a relationship, its informality and impermanence are thought to bring its own insecurity: *you have to keep something back in case it doesn't work.*[64] Though there is an emphasis on commitment: *the promises we make are not just mutuality and faithfulness, but responsibility - to look after this other person when things go wrong.*[65]

There is concern for a cohabiting couple reluctant to consider a commitment to marriage, for whatever reason. In the present socio-economic climate, *they don't want to be part of an institution but would be offended if you were to suggest they had not made a commitment.*[66] Clergy, and others, look for some intention to live out their commitment: *whether you are married or not, the important thing about a*

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[59] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[60] Wife of C019.
[61] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[62] C004: Roman Catholic.
[63] C030: ONC/Evangelical.
[64] C026: Methodist/Liberal.
[65] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[66] C002: Roman Catholic.

relationship is its quality, is there enough love also to give the strength to guard and love the children, and to be able to look out from that relationship to a wider community in need of love.[67] This, in effect, summarises the friendship quality that will be developed in Chapter 7.

4.2.1.2 Cohabitation and Relationship

The church has always been uncomfortable with sexual relationships outside of marriage and clergy opinions were divided over the place for sexual activity. There is a substantial disagreement with the statement 'Sexual activity no longer needs to be confined to marriage' (**1.12**). The results showed (17/28) were from RC and ONC respondents, supported by conservative and evangelical elements in the Anglican and Methodist churches that, spread across all denominational groups and traditions, comprising (6/7) conservative, (2/6) liberal, (1/4) liberal-evangelical and (8/11) evangelical. All groups and theological traditions are realistic and accept that a committed relationship is also likely to be sexual. When asked 'Is a non-adulterous conjugal relationship outside marriage always sinful?' (**1.3**), about one third of respondents agreed (9/29): the Anglican response was (1/10) compared with (2/3) Roman Catholic, (5/13) Methodist and (1/3) ONC clergy.

About half of all respondents (17/29), mostly Methodists and Anglicans from the conservative and liberal traditions, replied 'Sometimes', expressing genuine uncertainty: *I would be blind if I thought that couples who come for marriage were not already engaging in a physical relationship.*[68] There is a strong element of personal responsibility for behaviour: *if it is offensive to the ways of God or to others, then it is sinful. However, I come from a tradition that tends not to pronounce someone as being a sinner because they have done a particular act but does call upon them to reflect on their own sinfulness, which is quite a different thing.*[69] Clergy are very wary of applying the word 'sin' to these situations but *where sin does exist, it must always be forgivable.*[70] The emphasis is always on establishing a sustained and caring relationship, *the sin would not be to do with marriage, but the quality of the*

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[67] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[68] C015: Methodist/ Evangelical.
[69] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[70] C023: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.

relationship.[71] Whether or not cohabiting, most couples coming for marriage are nowadays almost certainly already in a sexual relationship and in the interviews, one of the major questions clergy considered is whether they would be living in a state of sin: *I have to say I am not sure (though I do struggle with the concept of same-sex relationships). We live in an imperfect world. God doesn't say 'I'm going to turn my back on you now' but the opposite, 'I will still love you and be there with you'. There should be some challenge in that.*[72]

Only a small proportion (3/29) of all respondents rejected the proposition outright.

Several questions in the survey addressed reasons why a couple might prefer to cohabit rather than marry. There was general disagreement (20/29) with the statement 'It is acceptable for a couple to define their own rules for their relationship' (**1.6**), though less so amongst liberals. About a quarter (7/27) agreed that 'Cohabitation is an attempt to achieve greater control over one's relationship' (**1.7**). (6/27) were not certain and (14/27) in disagreement, mostly Methodists but a few from other denominations also. To the proposition 'It is acceptable that a relationship may be formed without third party approval' (**1.8**), there was general agreement (15/26) with (6/26) 'not certain', spread across all traditions, and (5/26) disagreeing, mostly evangelicals.

The proposition that 'Cohabitation reflects greater equality between men and women' (**1.9**) met with almost unanimous (22/27) disagreement. There was instead a greater inclination (23/27) to agree with 'Cohabitation reflects a changing value placed on intimate relationships' (**1.10**). *Marriage can be made to create greater equality. Cohabitation requires both partners to be comfortable about the choice to cohabit. I have situations where the man does not want to marry but because he is dominant, he creates his own relationship. That doesn't guarantee equality.*[73] Freedom and entitlement to marriage does not automatically mean a couple will choose to marry: *this would depend on the couple's relationship with each other and with God and how they see their relationship in the light of their church's teaching.*[74]

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[71] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[72] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[73] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[74] C002: Roman Catholic.

Opinions were divided as to whether the advent of reliable contraception has encouraged cohabitation (**1.11**). The Roman Catholic respondents all thought not, but other traditions remain divided on this issue.

A few clergy have had to face the issue on cohabitation directly when members of their own family have entered relationships outside marriage and this is causing some to admit to a softening of their approach.[75]

Clergy were generally reluctant to draw any distinction between younger and older couples living together: *I'm entirely comfortable if it's solely for companionship. You then get into a whole area of what sexual intimacy is and where you draw the line. I would talk it through and try and work out what's going on, review each situation pastorally.*[76] Assumptions are sometimes confounded: *in a previous church, an elderly couple shared a house for friendship and companionship, but some people thought this a bit strange.*[77] A similar experience that had more far reaching implications was when *a couple in their 60s shared a house (he was a church warden). They lived as brother and sister. That was a different kind of relationship: there were some in the church who never quite coped with it.*[78]

There was a reluctance not to apply similar rules if a couple are living in a marriage-like situation: *once you start categorising, then you are probably denying the truth somewhere. People may be different, come to a relationship at different times.*[79] *The church has no issue if a relationship is on the basis of friendship. But if they were sharing a bed, it is only right that any sexual activity between couples is within the sacrament of marriage, no matter what your age.*[80] Expanding on this theme: *younger people will go into marriage because they think they should whereas older people may find the emphasis is on companionship. It is always hard to exclude a sexual relationship from older people; I have two aunts, both in their sixties who have remarried. For them that was the right thing to do but I don't think anyone was particularly upset at peers of theirs choosing not to.*[81] Within the Roman Catholic

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[75] M025: Methodist/Liberal; C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[76] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[77] C029: ONC/Evangelical.
[78] C029: ONC/Evangelical.
[79] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[80] C004: Roman Catholic.
[81] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic (C026: Methodist/Liberal expressed a similar view).

community, *long-standing members tend to be very strict and legalistic, and perhaps this stops them cohabiting. If they had been committed for any length of time, they would probably do the right thing and get married.*[82]

The issue of whether or not to marry is regarded by the clergy as very much a personal one, for example: *there is far less expectation by older couples for young couples to be married even though their family background would consider it wrong not to be.* Life experience plays a part in a couple's attitudes to each other and may enable them to form a relationship somewhere in between companionship and cohabitation or marriage: *in a previous church, a lady and gentleman, both widowed, the lady's son died and the gentleman went to her bed to 'comfort her' (they actually got married on his death-bed). They knew each other well enough. I am not suggesting the relationship between that man and woman had been sexual, but perhaps it was something more than friendship.*[83]

Many of the factors that deter a couple from marrying are to do with money: one of the big issues for older couples is the effect a new relationship will have on their existing families who may be worried about inheritance and family assets and exert pressure to prevent these being diverted elsewhere. There was a strong contention from conservative and evangelical clergy that these matters should be settled legally: *the principal of marriage does not make concessions on grounds of age.*[84] *If they are too old for sex, share a house but not a bed, this is slightly different, but rare.*[85] At the same time, families may be grateful for a third party to share the responsibility for care.

In their pastoral role, cohabitation raises practical problems for clergy when they are required to deal formally with unmarried couples if one partner in a relationship dies. The surviving partner is not automatically the 'next of kin', and has no authority to arrange a funeral. This can throw up uncertainties at a time of great distress such as who is arranging the funeral, who does the clergyman talk to, the surviving partner, yes, but who in the family? The deceased's family *may not even know of the relationship, or didn't approve: at a time of bereavement, clergy do not wish to be*

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[82] C004: Roman Catholic.
[83] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[84] C030: ONC/Evangelical.
[85] C030: ONC/Evangelical.

embroiled in a situation brought on by some irregular living arrangement. Marriages are often not perfect, but there are fewer problems in this direction.[86]

4.2.1.3 Multiple and Short-Term Relationships

There is some statistical evidence that persons coming to marriage are likely to have had one or more previous cohabiting relationships. There was strong disapproval amongst clergy (25/30) with the proposition 'Serial relationships are more appropriate to living in the 21st century' (**1.5**). The alternative proposition 'A happy short-term relationship is better than being locked into an unsatisfactory marriage' (**1.14**) brought a division of opinion: (10/26), all Anglicans or Methodists though from a spread of traditions but mostly liberals within these denominations agreed, with comments such as comments such as o*ne should not have to endure an unhappy marriage.*[87] Disagreement by Roman Catholic and Evangelical clergy reflected their resistance to cohabitation in any form though a significant body of clergy, mainly evangelical, (9/26), were 'not certain'. All Roman Catholic clergy and 2/3 ONC clergy disagreed, the remaining clergy being uncertain. Then comes the argument over how to recognise a long-term as opposed to a short-term relationship.[88]

The whole ethos of multiple relationships is questioned: *how may a couple be considered to have a secure, stable relationship, how do they accommodate children from previous relationships, including rights of access. All this must make their life more stressful.*[89]

Serial friendships have always been part of the process of selecting a suitable partner: when these involve cohabitation, it *invokes choice, comparison, competition, and a process one cannot normally reverse.*[90] In a pastoral context, this brings about uncertainty because the 'choice' may be made for sexual reasons rather than an expression of love and compatibility: *You don't know how 'safe' is the relationship or even what you are dealing with.*[91] Being able to exercise this choice may be an illusion: *it's great when people are free to make their choices, and take the*

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[86] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[87] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[88] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[89] C018: Methodist/Evangelical.
[90] R002: Roman Catholic.
[91] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.

consequences of their actions. But when people go in for a life of 'serial monogamy', they end up with no solidity in their lives. One of my friends has come through several of what were probably faithful relationships and he's now heading towards being just a lonely old man. I would resist the proposition that one should have rules that prohibited him from doing what he currently does but it causes real tension.[92]

This attitude of choice risks masking an inability or lack of intent to form a lasting relationship: *the general ethos is that people must be free to make their choices as they go along and not be committed from day one because ten years later, things might be different. The ease with which people can make and break relationships can create a frightful mess.*[93] A more difficult pastoral issue is psychological, the need for *an awareness and acceptance that one's 'partner' has had other relationships in which the present partner has not been involved.*[94]

The discussions raised a number of issues that contrived to encourage multiple relationships. One observation was that *young people, even in the church, think that it is quite acceptable to be with a certain person for so long then move to someone else: a partnership with someone is not necessarily for life.*[95] Whether through lack of self-confidence or other factors, there appear to be certain people who find it difficult to sustain a relationship. One of the perceived consequences of serial relationships is a lowering of expectation: *you form a loving and caring relationship, but something starts to slip and the relationship ends. Again with the second and a pattern of behaviour associated with break-up emerges. Instead of learning tolerance, wisdom and working at a relationship, couples learn abandonment.*[96] Thus cohabitation may engender a culture of failure that has an impact on marriage and family life, one that is often endorsed by the media: *it can make marriages and families feel vulnerable by the way relationships are portrayed, conditioned to wait for the worst to happen in your own life.*[97] There are strong reasons for wanting couples to live in committed relationships: *it's no coincidence that statistics show that couples who have not*

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[92] C029: Methodist/Liberal.
[93] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[94] C025: Methodist/Liberal.
[95] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[96] Wife of C019.
[97] C003: Roman Catholic.

committed themselves to each other in marriage are far more likely just to give up when there are problems.[98]

Clergy recognise that this developing social pattern may stem from changing attitudes towards marriage, but are concerned that this should not translate into a short-term perspective: *the economic forces which constrained people in the past no longer hold. A women is not often in a position where they have no other option, the man no longer the sole breadwinner. People have less patience to live through difficulties: part of self-fulfilment, self-determination is an admission that you only live once. Letting go of some of the religious and social depths of life means that what we have is here and now. Even for a couple living 'permanently', they cannot dismiss there may be something better, a potential reason not to be married.*[99] It is clear that intention and commitment go together: *I'm not happy about serial monogamy with its intention to walk away and form a relationship with someone else should the relationship cease to satisfy.*[100]

Occasionally, a short-term relationship may be beneficial in providing security: *if they are a young couple meeting up at University or whatever, there is a sense of security after leaving the family home, not being on your own but not with any long-term intention.*[101]

One of the underlying flaws in the arguments put forward in favour of cohabitation is that *walking away from cohabitation is more than the division of property. There is an emotional involvement that many couples don't appreciate. They are experiencing something of the reality of that one-flesh unity. I would caution against any view that suggested that it is easy for cohabiting couples to separate.*[102]

The issue of children prompted several comments, a general view being that they should be protected and not be subjugated to selfish attitudes of the cohabitees: *if there are children's interests to safeguard, regardless of who their parents are, their security should be paramount – but this is not necessarily guaranteed by a wedding*

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[98] C028: ONC/Evangelical.
[99] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[100] C010: Anglican/Catholic-Anglican.
[101] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[102] C013: Anglican/Liberal.

ring.[103] There was particular concern where there are children are from different relationships or dependants other than children that also pose problems.[104]

4.2.1.4 Divorce and Remarriage

Although not an explicit question in the survey, the parallel between serial cohabitation and divorce and remarriage was an issue frequently raised by clergy in the interviews, particularly when *people are not prepared to struggle with marriage.*[105] As divorce has become easier and lost its social stigma, distinctions between cohabitation and marriage have become blurred. Partners can move from one relationship or marriage to another with relative ease. At present, *the difference between breakdown of cohabitation and marriage is largely to do with legal consequences. Cohabiting couples can obviously stop living together: they don't have the same legal constraint, but still have the problems.*[106] Partners may abandon a relationship but in practice, *this may be no less traumatic than divorce, firstly breaking the emotional ties, then the apportioning of property and responsibilities. It is difficult to walk away from any relationship.*[107] In many ways, divorce acknowledges the pain of separation, within which divorce there can be a positive element: *on the moral issue, on their life, they need to ask not just why they do not want to remain married but what has been the nature of their relationship.*[108] In cohabitation, *if a couple decides to separate, the pain can be just like divorce.*[109]

The liberalisation of the divorce laws in the early 1970s meant that many couples who had opted for separation could now remarry: *when the law changed in 1972, grandfather finally got a divorce and my grand-parents married, legally. They had worked and lived together for 30 plus years, but for only 10 years were they properly married.*[110] This example shows how the easing of the divorce laws brought resolution for some couples who were otherwise 'living in sin'. However, divorce is still seen to

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[103] C011: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic (C002: Roman Catholic and C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical expressed similar views).
[104] C002: Roman Catholic (C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical expressed a similar view).
[105] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[106] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[107] C013: Anglican/Liberal (C006: Anglican/Mainstream expressed a similar view).
[108] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[109] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[110] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.

devalue marriage: *the trivialisation of divorce is awful.*[111] Also, the 'guilty party' debate is still active: To determine the extent to which *one party played a part in the break-up of the other's marriage can be problematical.*[112] Nevertheless, people change: *neither the church nor anybody else should insist a couple must continue in this marriage for evermore just because at the time you committed yourselves to each other and were intent on making this relationship work. If the marriage has ended it should be dismantled with as much integrity as possible.*[113]

Within the church, clergy attitudes are shaped not only by the theology and doctrines of their church but by their own personal convictions. This can create tensions arising from the very personal nature of marriage and relationships. *The church is surrounded by regulations and appears strict on marriage. Their marriage has failed and that hurt has to be ministered to.*[114] *If you are so willed, you could put lots of legal objections in the way. The Church's law on marriage is strong and unequivocal but can become a great hindrance because of this. The Catholic Church has got to look again at what is commitment but there's not much room for manoeuvre; the risk is that the break-up* [of a previous marriage or relationship] *may be a symptom rather than the cause of the problem. The Church is beginning to look at this, also at other cultures and how they deal with it, but the general principle still holds, that a valid marriage is binding for life.*[115] Even then, there may be occasions that dictate a more pastoral approach: *perhaps they've seen something in their new situation and I may be prepared to give them a lifeline.*[116]

Outside of the Roman Catholic Church, there is more freedom for remarriage, though depending on the views of the clergy, not necessarily in each and every church. A remarriage of a divorced person while their former partner is still living may now be celebrated in an Anglican church, subject to clear guidelines issued by the House of Bishops.[117] An aspect that has some correspondence with serial cohabitation is: *the first marriage didn't work; how do you know a second one will? My conscience does*

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[111] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[112] C025: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[113] C028: ONC/Evangelical.
[114] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[115] C002: Roman Catholic (C004: Roman Catholic expressed a similar view).
[116] C002: Roman Catholic.
[117] Guidelines issued by the House of Bishops are summarised for local Anglican clergy in *Marriage in Church After Divorce. Guidelines for Clergy in the Diocese of Ripon and Leeds* (Diocese of Ripon and Leeds, 2003). This includes Anglican clergy in the Harrogate area.

not allow me to say let us try this and see. They may say I am now in love with this person but how do you know? The intention should be for a life-long union and to make a public acknowledgement of their commitment.[118]

Cohabitation and serial relationships emerge as a factor in marriage preparation to be discussed in Chapter 8.

4.2.2 Cohabitation and Community

Although not part of the questionnaire, the interactions between cohabitation, marriage and society emerged as an area of concern. Current social trend towards informal relationships caused at least one respondent to reflect on the whole nature of how relationships are structured: o*ne of the differences within society now is that we don't look for our social structure within family but within friendships. When we live together, we change the definition of relationship; we are saying family is no longer so important as friendship.*[119] Marriage establishes who we are and to whom we are related through our genealogy: w*ith cohabitation, you lose the continuity of the generations, it becomes an amorphous drift of people who don't have the same declared relationship to everyone else. When relationships are totally unregulated, you don't have the same sense of belonging.*[120] There is a view that *marriage is being pushed to the margins of society, resulting in social insecurity whereas people need to have certain things fixed. For the church, marriage is one of those fixed points.*[121] This supports the view that *marriage remains one of the blocks of society and some of the ills in society could be due to marriages breaking down. One example is the acceptance of single-parent families in their own right: they must assume a different role model as well as risking living in isolation.*[122] The media is held partially responsible for many of the changes in social and family behaviour: *it is inserted between people and the ordinary means of mission that is available to them from the church, family, parents, and schools. The RE that the children of John Fisher School have is undermined because the media is there first.*[123]

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[118] C006: Anglican/Mainstream (C025: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical expressed a similar view).
[119] C022: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[120] C027: Methodist/Liberal/Radical.
[121] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[122] C002: Roman Catholic.
[123] C003: Roman Catholic.

4.2.2.1 Cohabitation and Public Commitment

It was clear from the written responses and interviews that the public affirmation of one's commitment is held to be a vital part of marriage: *marriage is saying publicly, 'This is the person for me'; cohabiting is a very private thing, there is no public statement.*[124] Couples living together long-term, with no intention to marry, may have legal agreements to define the disposition of their wealth if they separate or one of them dies, but, *marriage is something much bigger than just a contract between two persons. It involves the whole community. Any loss of the social aspects means it becomes more individualistic.*[125] *Couples do not consider this if they are just living together.*[126] Clergy showed a conscious need to reassess what marriage is and how Christian marriage sets itself apart from the purely legal declaration of marriage in a civil ceremony: *the legal basis might be the same, even the ceremony might be vaguely similar, but the conceptual notion of what marriage can be is extremely different. The public nature of marriage enshrined in the church wedding ceremony stands in stark contrast to private forms of civil marriage.*[127] Whether it should be wholly public is questioned: *it needs to be public, but I'm not sure how much more it needs to be in front of than one's friends and family.*[128]

For couples content to live together, *there is maybe that sense of 'Why do we need a bit of paper?'*[129] What the 'piece of paper' does symbolise is the fact that *I am completely committed to another person: the public act of affirming their love that can add to that piece of paper. You are declaring in public 'you are the only person for me, for my life, in sickness and in health', and that's a much more powerful statement than just writing a bit of paper, a contract.*[130] The piece of paper may seem insignificant, but it symbolises the stability within society that marriage can bring: *I wouldn't condemn out of hand or judge others who cohabit out of choice but I value the opportunity to make public that we don't live isolated individual lives. There's a phrase in the new service 'we all begin a new life in the community'.*[131] The way in

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[124] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[125] C010: Anglican/Anglo-Catholic.
[126] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.
[127] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[128] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[129] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[130] C017: Methodist/Evangelical; (C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical and C004: Roman Catholic expressed a similar view).
[131] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.

which marriage reinforces society through its effect of creating networks of relationships produced the response: *cohabitation can be very isolating, selfish arrangement, and need not involve anyone outside the couple themselves. It is a factor that we underestimate and is certainly underestimated by society. If partners can declare their commitment to each other, why not also to the world?*[132] It is important that a couple make a public declaration of their intention to live together as man and wife: *if the public commitment is not regarded as very important, the whole concept of marriage is quite difficult to hold together.*[133]

4.2.3 Cohabitation and Church Life

There is a potential tension where 'A couple, part of the worshipping community, are known to be cohabiting' (**3.1**). The overwhelming response (27/30) amongst clergy was 'to accept them as they are' (**3.1(a)**): *All couples should be welcomed into a church, regardless of their marital status, and whether or not they married in church.*[134]

A problem for an incumbent is that the marital status of a couple is not necessarily known: *I would not normally question marital status – so I probably don't know who in our large congregation is cohabiting.*[135] The reality in any parish is that *there will be people who regularly attend mass but who are in what you may either call irregular marriages or cohabiting. They see themselves with their families as part of the church community, especially where their children are concerned.*[136] Methodist ministers report similar situations: *we live in the 21st century and we must come to terms with the fact that cohabitation is a norm, even for Christian couples. If a cohabiting couple come to the church (and in my experience very few do unless they are wanting to be married) they should be welcomed and loved: I do wonder how Jesus would have reacted.*[137] An Anglican adds: *I have a number of friends who cohabited before marriage yet continued to be viable members of their worshipping community.*[138]

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[132] C025: Methodist/Liberal-Mainstream.
[133] C027: Methodist/Liberal.
[134] C027: Methodist/Liberal.
[135] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[136] C002: Roman Catholic-Catholic.
[137] C022: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical (C018: Methodist-Evangelical expressed a similar view).
[138] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.

Attitudes may change slightly if a couple's non-married status is known: *I draw a clear distinction between Christian couples and others. It is better to accept cohabitation and extend dialogue than to appear judgmental.*[139] Evangelicals are more inclined to intervene: *if it was a member of the congregation and wanted to cohabit, I would warn them against it. At the Biblical level, it is not right. At the social level, it creates a lot of insecurity, and if they have children, those children feel very insecure by removing ties that bind families and communities together.*[140] There is also the attitude of the congregation to be considered: a *couple may feel that the church is judging them. Setting that aside, my main concern is for the couple themselves.*[141]

Outside the Roman Catholic Church, there is no inclination to bar the persons concerned either from worship, (**3.1(b)**), or communion, (**3.1(c)**). *In general, I will always welcome a couple, but consider with them where they are and why they are at church. There may be circumstances that you need to explore with them.*[142] Attitudes are similar where one of the partners is non-church going, (**3.2(a)–(c)**). *The church should meet people where they are, and that includes a non-church-going partner. I wouldn't refuse communion to someone who was cohabiting.*[143]

There is a positive response, (17/29), to the question 'Should a couple within the church family known to be cohabiting be encouraged to marry?' (**3.3**). There is an even firmer response (27/29) to the proposition 'Any couple known to be cohabiting should be encouraged to marry' (**3.5**), giving a real sense of helping couples move their relationship forward. As will be seen in the following interview quotations, this can be a very sensitive issue: *not all marriages are made just as cohabitations are not all made. I am wary that if the couple do not have a good relationship, maybe the last thing you would do then is to encourage them to marry. People have thought the best thing to do for a couple I know and who have some very painful circumstances (there are children involved) is to get married. My perception was that the relationship was so bad the last thing I wanted them to do was to get married. I would have been much*

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[139] C005: Anglican/Conservative.
[140] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[141] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[142] C004: Roman Catholic.
[143] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.

happier living with the whole ambiguity of cohabitation for the sake of the children.[144] *I know other couples who through the loving care and acceptance by the church eventually wanted to commit themselves. If I accept cohabitation, it means accepting them not only as people but their relationship also. If children were involved, one would be unwilling to break up that family unit. Cohabitation may be wrong, but there are bigger pastoral issues to be considered.*[145]

A majority (20/25) responded 'yes' or 'sometimes' to 'If the couple refuses to marry, the church should not insist' (**3.4**), spread across all traditions. Any decision is the responsibility of the couple themselves. The emphasis is always on encouragement: a *divorced Catholic and a Methodist came back to the church and eventually married.*[146] There is a greater sense that: *the point at which I am invited in is usually where I find couples already considering marriage. If not, I can plant the thought in their minds but the Church must act with integrity.*[147] To insist on their marrying may not always be in the best interests of the couple: *in my experience, this is not 'a moral issue' for the church (as an institution it still is) but for individuals. We must accept that this is where we are.*[148]

This is all summarised by the almost unanimous response (28/30) of clergy to 'Extend pastoral care to cohabiting couples as couples and only as individuals should the need arise', (**3.6(a)-(d)**).

4.2.3.1 Children and Baptism

One of the first intimations the clergy have that a couple are not married is often when a child is brought for baptism. The response to 'Would you accept children of a cohabiting couple into the congregation?' (**3.7**) brought total agreement: *the rationale for baptism is whether there is faith, not virtue, though ideally the two go together. You can't blame the children for the situation their parents are in.*[149] It was not unexpected that a majority of clergy (23/30) would respond positively to the question

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[144] C003: Roman Catholic.
[145] C018: Methodist/Evangelical (C014: Anglican/Mainstream expressed a similar view).
[146] C023: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical. This raises the issue of divorce and remarriage for the Roman Catholic.
[147] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[148] C025: Methodist/Liberal.
[149] C002, C004: Roman Catholic both expressed similar views.

'Would you baptise (or receive) children of a couple known to be cohabiting?' (**3.8**). The hope amongst clergy is that this will always lead the couple to consider their own relationship: *I can immediately recall three couples who sought baptism for their children and subsequently wanted to marry in church. Recently, I baptised a child of an unmarried couple who, movingly, expressed thanks to the church for accepting them and treating them with respect.*[150] Though only (1/30) disagreed that a child of unmarried parents should be accepted for baptism, an evangelical Methodist, there are others (5/30) who exercise caution with: these are all Protestant clergy. One of their comments was that *parents are already aware of legitimacy and how they are going to bring up their child but people aren't always aware that the way they live is an issue.*[151] When the child of an unmarried couple is brought for baptism: *the child represents a climax in their relationship and they are much more open to pastoral influence. We welcome children but will say to the parents, why are you not married? How are you going to bring up this child, give it security? Do you think it's time you committed yourselves to each other. Some will say no, say we are happy as we are. I have to accept that.*[152] *They have to consider what is in the best interest of their child.*[153] If there was a general view, it was that child baptism (or reception, depending upon the tradition) should never be denied: *baptism is available to everybody and you cannot turn your back on the children of cohabitees. When one partner is refused a divorce and you end up with a partnership with a child, what do you do? They are bringing up their child in as Christian a home as their situation will allow. If they are being torn apart by other matters, you cannot add to that burden.*[154]

On the wider issue of baptism/ reception, many clergy expressed a view that the birth of a child is an event that may be celebrated without all the euphoria and distractions that come with arranging a wedding. The difference is that a couple is not coming to the presbytery, vicarage, or manse but the clergyman is able to meet them in the family home and it is then much easier to talk about wider issues of family life: *I did baptise a child to a couple who were not married and suggested they might marry soon. A year later I had the privilege of marrying them. If I had turned them away in the first instance, they would not have come back. The basic principle is if they can*

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[150] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[151] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[152] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[153] C005: Anglican, Mainstream.
[154] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.

make the baptism promises, hand on heart, whether or not they are married doesn't matter. What matters is faith.[155]

Where parents are not married, *sometimes no longer living together, baptism requires an element of extra care.*[156] A rather more difficult situation arises where *a woman decides she just wants a baby but no marital ties or even a relationship.*[157] Other anomalous situations can arise such as *where parents live apart; the couple are not a happy family and the child's parents don't have anything more to do with each other; the parents have cohabited but the responsibility of pregnancy has been more than they could cope with and have separated; a teenager has had an accidental pregnancy. For couples or parents on the 'fringe', baptising a child becomes a harder issue and a real test of your theology.*[158]

4.2.3.2 Cohabitation and Church Office

There were some reservations over the impact of cohabitating persons on church life. A majority of clergy, (16/25) disagreed or were not certain that the church should 'Bar them from holding (church) office' (**3.1(d)**), though there was division of opinion is found across both denomination and tradition: *it would not make any difference to me or to us as a Christian community. I wouldn't ordinarily bar a person from office just because they were cohabiting.*[159] There were stronger feelings amongst Evangelicals, where (5/9) agreed, stressing the role model of marriage: *it is difficult for those who are cohabiting to hold office in church because of the church's teaching on marriage. I know we are called to express grace and forgiveness; for many families that moment is when a cohabiting couple get married.*[160] The survey finds little difference whether or not the partner is church going, (17/25) disagreeing, or not certain, (**3.2(d)**). Not all offices would be treated similarly: The issue is more sensitive where those in office interact directly with congregations: *I make a distinction with regard to Representative Office (mainly Church Wardens) and other offices in the church. The Anglican Church has guidelines and I consider it reasonable to expect anyone seeking*

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[155] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[156] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[157] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[158] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[159] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[160] C029: ONC/Evangelical.

a representative role to be married or celibate at that time.[161] Another adds: *where people are following a lifestyle that seems to contradict Christian understanding, we would question whether they should be in a position of leadership.*[162] Many of the conventional clues to identify marital status are now absent, though by the time a person presents for office, it would be unusual for clergy not to have some knowledge of their background: *I find some couples keep their own names, not just for professional reasons. One person actually put herself forward as a Reader: it turned out she was married, but had kept her maiden name.*[163]

For most clergy, cohabitation in the context of church office is not a major issue: *I have once been in the position of having a Churchwarden, who was cohabiting (I wasn't there when the appointment was made). I have other couples in the congregation who are not married, but don't make an issue of it.*[164] The general view was that persons in any sort of authority should be able to set a good example, though in practice, this is not always easy: *we have had at least two cohabiting couples in the last few years and had to address cohabitation in the life of the church (both couples did eventually marry). My view was that they should have thought about living apart and/or stepping down from their leadership roles, not least because of the image they presented to our young people.*[165] *In an ideal world, we should maintain standards but when you take on stewards etc, you don't vet them; they may not be cohabiting, but use drugs, cheat and so on. The safeguard is that the congregation won't accept stewards who haven't already got some sort of standing.*[166] Where there is knowledge of a person's lifestyle, it is appropriate to consider the situation: *there would be a need for them to work out their own position. You can sit quite happily in the congregation, making your own moral judgment, but if you are coming up for churchwarden, it is much more legitimate for the vicar to question the ethics and moral implications of your lifestyle.*[167]

What is not discussed here is the ethical lifestyle of the clergy themselves. A minister volunteered the comment: *if a minister transgresses, they may be out! I can recall big*

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[161] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[162] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[163] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[164] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[165] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[166] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[167] C009: Anglican, Liberal-Evangelical.

disciplinary issues before 'Conference' resulting in ministers taken out of ministry.[168]

4.2.4 Church Teaching and Relationship Education

In most churches, teaching on marriage comes predominantly through marriage preparation though many take seriously the more general question of marriage education, particularly amongst teenagers: *you have to give young people a framework and the confidence that if it all goes wrong, they can come back to the church. The real thing is to be able to show grace and help them understand there is something else, given that they are at an age where they are experimenting.*[169] An underlying worry amongst clergy is that marriage has become a predominantly secular issue, causing Christian teaching to be marginalized: *youngsters who in their teens may have espoused the 'love waits' philosophy are likely to be led into the 'modern' trend of 'live together first, then marry when you feel ready for it'.*[170] This presents clergy with a considerable challenge since *Christian teaching in scripture gives little support. Does the church have authority to change its teaching? Is the effective witness of the church weakened by compromise?*[171] These are questions all in need of resolution, given that *the church has been very arrogant in presuming it has the right to be heard and that people are going to accept its word without explanation.*[172]

The overall view amongst the clergy consulted was to agree (22/30) that 'The church should seek to strengthen marriage and discourage cohabitation' (**2.9**), though the means of doing so were less clear.

This statement revealed a range of attitudes: *the church doesn't speak with one voice on many issues and that is one of the difficulties. In practice, the church has responded to society, but society has pushed the boundaries and the church has found itself needing to open up a bit.*[173] A Liberal-Evangelical view was that *liberalism in the church hasn't helped but has made situations worse for people. At one time they*

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[168] C026: Methodist, Liberal-Radical.
Cohabitation amongst clergy is not unknown: I have knowledge that of least one clergy-person who cohabited and started a family before getting married. The local church accepted them (this was outside Harrogate).
[169] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.
[170] C031: ONC/Evangelical.
[171] C015: Methodist/Evangelical.
[172] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[173] C029: ONC/Evangelical.

knew what the church said, and they knew the bounds of the church and could accept or reject them. Some churches take a very conservative line, others a liberal line, so people have no yardstick to go by. We have got to be understanding, but not so liberal that we cause society to hurt itself.[174] This was not a call to change the basic teaching on marriage but *it could be better explained according to where people are.*[175] The church today has to accommodate a society that makes its own rules rather than accept conventional standards: *your life can be whatever you want to be. Personal achievement is now all-important and it doesn't matter how you get it.*[176] Within this, there is a need to explain the Christian ideal and theology of the nature of marriage: *couples enter into a grace of God that is beyond them. Only God understands how on the basis of knowing somebody for a limited time, you can enter into a lifetime commitment.*[177]

Most Roman Catholic clergy claim that their teaching on marriage is already strong. However, comments and observations regarding the incidence of divorcees and others in 'irregular' relationships within their churches and schools suggest that here too, their teaching is not always effective: *a person today can't see the divine call to marriage that follows friendship and commitment. God makes the offer but they are unable to respond because of the kind of culture we live in.*[178]

When faced with the proposition that 'A couple currently cohabiting but seeking church marriage, the church should disregard their current situation' (**2.4**), opinions were more divided: (14/28) agreed, from all denominational groups except ONC and across all traditions. Those (12/28) who disagreed were from the conservative and liberal and evangelical traditions. The biggest tradition group who would not disregard their current situation were Evangelicals, (5/11): *every couple presenting themselves to us must be regarded as unique and taught/ counselled accordingly. We try not to allow cohabitation to prevent us from leading them into a deeper and more responsive faith.*[179] There was a similar division to the suggestion that 'Church marriage should be 'on demand' provided there are no legal impediments' (**2.1**). The typical Anglican view is that *the church is there to serve the Parish, and should not*

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[174] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[175] C002: Roman Catholic.
[176] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.
[177] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[178] C003: Roman Catholic.
[179] C031: ONC/Evangelical.

put obstacles put in the way of a couple wanting to marry.[180] Hence, there was virtually no support (2/26) for the proposition that 'Church marriage should be made more difficult' (**2.2**). This represents a different situation to 'Church marriage should be denied to a couple if you are not convinced they expect to fulfil the Christian ideals of marriage' (**2.3**). Here, there was agreement from only (2/7) conservatives, (5/10) evangelicals and (3/5) liberal-evangelicals. The experience of clergy is that often, couples haven't known each other for very long, or have little idea of what marriage is about: *A woman came to me for marriage. She had been turned down by an Anglican priest. She had known the man for only three months and he had been divorced twice already. I advised to come back in twelve months time, but after expressing her anger, opted for a civil marriage and church blessing. For her own reasons, it had been important for her to marry in church.*[181] In another situation, a woman coming for her third marriage, *was not prepared to accept that love grows and is not the same today as it was yesterday or will be tomorrow, and that it has to grow in the relationship. On this occasion, she walked away.*[182] When situations like this arise, there is considerable scope for better relationship education, in which the church may be prominent.

4.2.4.1 Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation varies in both structure and content, partly shaped by the couples' life experiences. The main thrust is to *help them understand the meaning of the vows and the commitments these imply. The approach is different for those who are committed Christians to those whose church links are tenuous or non-existent. Part of the preparation includes repentance and renewal through grace, recognising past failures.*[183]

A majority (24/29) of clergy supported the proposition that 'The church should strengthen Christian marriage preparation' (**2.7**), though with some uncertainty amongst Roman Catholics (1/3), Anglicans, (3/11), and Methodists, (1/12). The reservation from those 'not certain' was to question the effectiveness of marriage

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[180] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[181] C021: Methodist/ Liberal-Evangelical.
[182] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[183] C015: Methodist/Evangelical.

preparation, given that couples are already embarked on a course of action that is not easy to reverse with the financial penalties and loss of face involved.

Many couples present themselves for marriage even though they may have had little or no connection with the church: divorcees, particularly, may have found it impossible to remarry in a church of their choice. *I try to find ways that don't sound threatening of asking them why they want to get married, their intentions, how they feel about one another, and if there are circumstances I should know about. I don't want to be seen to be prying into their affairs, but if it was their relationship that led to the breakdown of a former marriage, that presents particular issues in relation to the wedding.*[184] When there are so many alternatives to getting married in church, clergy will explore with couples their reasons for marrying in church. From one Methodist comes the comment *that they want to do it 'properly', in the eyes of God, in church. It seems as though there is a sense that somewhere within it all, God's power gives marriage a spiritual dimension. It's about creating a stronger bond. They may not be people you would call churchgoers, but the book says everything what marriage is. If you force people down a line that they can't accept, you're going against their integrity.*[185]

When a couple are already living together, then their motives for marrying will be closely questioned, in particular, *'why now' to get married, is this something both partners really want.*[186] There may be *a thorough examination of the relationship, the expectations the couple have of marriage, their priorities in life and exploration of common pitfalls, together with opportunities to learn about conflict resolution etc.*[187] The discussions may centre round factors such as

a) peer pressure;

b) whether marriage is a means of resolving pre-existing difficulties arising during cohabitation;

c) their intention and ability to form a lifelong commitment and their likelihood of forming a caring, faithful relationship based on Christian principles;

d) their place in a wider community;

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[184] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[185] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical; C026: Methodist/Liberal.
[186] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[187] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.

e) *communication, helping them to develop and encourage learning from their past relationships, identifying their expectations.*[188]

Intent must be accompanied by two important long-term visions. The first is for permanence: *in the permanence of their relationship, each has a helpmate for their security and well-being. The healing mechanism they start to learn through courtship becomes a resource for the community because they have it for each other.*[189] The second is that *you want to grow old together. That matters more than anything else, whether or not they are cohabiting.*[190] These visions are embodied in commitment and intent: *I accept that sometimes, marriages break down but you should have a commitment and intention for life when you set out.*[191]

Marriage as a means of moving a relationship forward came over strongly from several clergy, who would focus on *the things that bind you together currently and how are they going to continue. By the time they come to you to book a wedding, they have so much invested in that day that they don't come with an open mind. Not to ask 'Should we get married?' because they have already made that decision.*[192] Many clergy will explore their expectations of marriage and what difference it will make to their relationship if they are living together: *I always ask why they want to get married, since they are already 'doing it all'. They usually say they want to show each other a deeper level of commitment.*[193]

A majority (21/30) disagreed that the proposition 'A couple should be encouraged to live apart for at least a token period before their marriage' (**2.6**). The intention is twofold, firstly to test a couple's strength of commitment and secondly, to emphasise their transition from being two single persons to man and wife in a one-flesh relationship. There were some from each denominational group who did advocate separation, suggesting periods from two or three weeks to a few months. However, this did not find universal support: many clergy were cautious that this was not an appropriate response to a couple's situation: *of twenty-five weddings I have had in the past two years, I think only three have involved couples not living together. A majority*

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[188] C015: Methodist/Evangelical; C010: Anglican/Anglo-Catholic; C012: Anglican/Evangelical.
[189] C010: Anglican/Anglo-Catholic.
[190] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[191] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[192] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[193] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.

accept the basic Christian principles that living together and having sex before marriage is not ideal but it's much more sensitive to say at least you are getting married and concentrate on that. The only caveat I would put is that a Catholic is obliged, whether or not they are living together, to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation before they get married, and as near to the day as possible. Most couples naturally separate a few days before the wedding, which also gives a chance to put things right in a sacramental way.[194] There is an opinion that living apart before the wedding has practical and not just theological benefits: *I believe it is impossible to be able to prepare for marriage when you are living together. I encourage young couples to live apart during the preparation but there is a limited extent to how far I can influence them.*[195] For many couples, there is a fragmentary symbol of living apart: *on the night before the wedding, the husband to be will have a night on the floor of the best man whilst the bride wants to leave her parents' home to go to the wedding. They will come to church separately. It's a fragment of a period of separation then coming together again rather than your wedding being just another day in your life.*[196] However, whereas it may be important for a bride to uphold the tradition of leaving the family home, even if she has been cohabiting; *other couples just say, we've lived together and that's it.*[197]

Part of the problem faced is that couples live together first, then decide to get married. Some clergy hold very strong views that a couple should not cohabit before marriage: *A former colleague refused to marry someone who declined to move out of the house prior to wedding. They had been living together and have a child; I don't think it's for us to break up a relationship.*[198] Another minister no longer in active pastoral ministry takes an equally strong view: *I never felt it appropriate to marry couples already living together. Some people would see the marriage as putting right a sin. For me, that is a theological problem because it says something about the sacrament of marriage. I don't believe that just by going through a wedding service you put right a sin.*[199] In contemporary society, couples living together wouldn't regard themselves a being in a state of sin: *other things may be sinful but not their relationship. If you say*

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[194] C004: Roman Catholic.
[195] C003: Roman Catholic.
[196] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[197] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[198] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[199] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.

cohabitation's wrong, this implies it is a sin. Lots of us do worse things behind closed doors; the difference is that cohabitation is very visible.[200]

Couples may react differently to suggestions that they should live apart: *one couple said yes, we hear what you say and will live apart for six months before we marry. Another couple felt unable to do that because it would be too expensive. I couldn't press them on the issue, say I'm not going to marry them, but for them, marriage would be a different experience to the couple who did live apart.*[201] Conscious of their pastoral role, the risk in taking too firm a line is that *we make cohabitation into an unforgivable sin whilst those who are greedy or tell lies may remain free. We can preach but cannot force or coerce anyone to accept our teaching, especially in this post-modern era. I therefore temper my teaching with love and grace, so that we might lead to a more biblical life-style.*[202]

There is a common perception that *when people are living together, I would have to treat them differently. I have always tried to be honest regarding the church's position, but also accept the sincerity of their position. If I decide to take the line that it's inappropriate for them to get married in a church, I communicate that to them. Some couples will accept that their lifestyle has been inappropriate and live apart before coming to the wedding service but I've had more people decline to do that.*[203]

Some clergy have adapted the wedding service for couples openly cohabiting. *The difficulty is that it often involves the wider family who may be involved in the church and find the whole situation awkward.*[204] There is uneasiness when a couple seek a church wedding *after leading a life that is not consistent with Christian values. The church is being asked to sanction their lifestyle. A minister was approached by a friend of the prospective bride and groom to say 'do you realise the man she is marrying is not the one she is currently living with'. If he had not faced them to say this is inconsistent with Christian marriage and cannot go along with it, he would*

[200] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[201] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[202] C031: ONC/Evangelical.
[203] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.
[204] C029: ONC/Evangelical.

have been appeasing them in something that was totally wrong, and hurtful to all concerned.[205]

A couple have a right to be married in their parish church provided they are within civil and canon law. This may mean that clergy are powerless to prevent marriages taking place that they consider are clearly destined to fail: *in twenty-eight years, I have come across only one couple who decided not to get married as a result of the marriage preparation course. I recall trying desperately hard to dissuade one couple, as did everybody else involved. The marriage lasted less than a fortnight. He came back a month later and said why didn't anybody tell me. But when they come, they're on a high and not listening.*[206] Occasionally, clergy will be confronted by a 'shotgun' wedding, invariably to satisfy the attitudes of the parents, because the girl has become pregnant: *there is nothing we can do about it, legally. In the interests of the couple, I would be bound to say 'don't do it'. But it is probably better to offer marriage on demand, to do your best with whatever is on offer and accept that occasionally, there is something you can't influence.*[207]

There are unusual requests: *an older couple asked me if they could make up their own wedding vows; their problem was that they didn't want all the business of sharing everything. I suggested that if you are getting married and don't trust each other with something as straight forward as a house and some money, how are you going to trust reach other with things that really are important such as your hopes and your fears, and death? After some thought, they decided not to get married.*[208] *There may be a much wider range of vows permissible in a civil wedding than a church wedding, but I take the view that marriage is a God given estate where a man and woman are joined together, expressed through the liturgy.*[209]

4.2.4.1.1 Resources for Marriage Preparation

The whole question of marriage preparation comes down to resources, not least, time. Consequently, many clergy find difficulty in giving marriage preparation the attention

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[205] C021: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[206] C002: Roman Catholic.
[207] C009: Anglican/Evangelical.
[208] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[209] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.

it needs. Other clergy whose churches are small or unattractive and do not attract many weddings find they are unable to justify spending more than nominal resources on marriage preparation. The value of marriage preparation so close to the wedding is questioned anyway: *by the time they come to see me, it's all a bit late.*[210] It is the expectation of any couple coming for a church wedding that some level of instruction will be forthcoming: *in one sense, the people who come for marriage don't need it but they are happy to talk about the issues. To have no marriage preparation is not a good idea, but it is something we are always looking at.*[211]

The resources devoted to couples coming for marriage vary considerably across the denominations, heavily dependent on clergy workload and other commitments. From the reaction of clergy, marriage preparation is something they take seriously, either through their own programmes or via a standard questionnaire offered by organisations such as FOCCUS.[212] The FOCCUS questionnaire has 157 questions covering all areas from lifestyle to family finance and so on: *it's about communication and how to meet one another's needs. It shows where they are strong and where they are weak. If they have a low score, they will see very clearly they are not ready to commit because they don't yet know one another.*[213] The Roman Catholic Diocese of Leeds publishes its own Marriage Preparation course divided into six modules plus an introduction and book of readings aimed at couples meeting and discussing the issues involved in groups as well as through private consultation.[214]

Churches that develop their own programmes of marriage preparation can adjust to the needs of the couple. Shorter questionnaires may be incorporated: *I give them two copies of my questionnaire to take away and fill in themselves: the idea is that they each answer the questions then compare their answers. Some of the questions are*

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[210] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic.
[211] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.
[212] Foccus 2000, *An Inventory for Marriage Preparation. Christian Non-Denominational Edition* (Omaha: FOCCUS Inc., 3214 N. 60th St., Omaha, NE 68104-3495, USA, 1997). *FOCCUS: Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding & Study.*
[213] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[214] Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Leeds, *Marriage Preparation Course* (Leeds: Family Life Ministry, Diocesan Pastoral Centre, 2000). The modules are :-
1 – What's it all about?
2 – How do we communicate?
3 – Personality and family background.
4 – How to manage conflict and stay friends.
5 – The gifts of sexuality and intimacy in marriage.
6 – Sharing the Spirit: living the Sacrament.

about their hopes for the future, some about past experiences, and some about sex etc. I have been using that approach successfully for six or seven years.[215]

A common factor of all these formal courses is that they cover a wide range of matters outside the core theological issues, such as health, finance, property and personal views and attitudes towards children and family, also the arrangements for the wedding day. One problem faced by clergy *is that if a couple have been living together, they have sorted out many of these issues for themselves, though their reaction to long-term health problems, work patterns and pensions and even how they will cope with children may not have been discussed. This is seen as a valuable part of marriage preparation.*[216]

4.2.4.1.2 Marriage Preparation and Lifestyle

The experience of clergy is that almost without exception, couples are already living together by the time they come for marriage: *for a couple who are 'engaged', there's no expectation nowadays that they will live apart before they get married.*[217] Neither is there any guarantee *when couples give separate addresses, they are not actually living together. One couple with a family was adamant that the father did not live with her. I don't know what he was trying to prove but to give separate addresses doesn't prove anything.*[218] Couples do not expect an adverse reaction from the priest, vicar or minister: *they are much less apologetic that they live together, whereas ten years ago they would have been a bit embarrassed about it.*[219] Nevertheless, there is often a tension when cohabiting couples come for marriage: c*andidates are always nervous about what I'm going to say to them, conscious of the fact I am saying yes or no to an important occasion. They don't expect me to say I can't marry you because you are cohabiting. They don't consider me as being anything other than the agent of this marriage.*[220] Similar reactions are found within the Roman Catholic Church: *couples come to make the arrangements and you find they share the same address. They usually acknowledge that yes they are in a relationship, necessary for financial*

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[215] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[216] C028: ONC/Evangelical.
[217] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[218] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[219] C007: Anglican/Evangelical-Catholic (C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic expressed a similar view).
[220] C013: Anglican/Liberal (C006: Anglican/Mainstream expressed a similar view).

reasons. Not perfect, but at least they are being honest.[221] A Methodist comments that *with up to twenty weddings in a year and most couples already living together, it is not for me (or the church) to moralise, but to be alongside, to support, listen and be open.*[222] The general experience of clergy is that most couples are reasonably honest: *I suppose there is a slight hesitancy but they are certainly not abashed by it all.*[223]

A couple's background history will often not be known.[224] Given that cohabitation and marriage invoke very similar lifestyle patterns, *I would want to explore what marriage means. They have obviously made a decision that being married is going to be different than just living together. If their relationship is stable, I usually do ask them both, when did this happen and was it an easy step for you to take. The usual answer is that cohabitation was functional – money, house etc. I try to ask about their parents' attitude: usually the bride-to-be will say mum was anxious initially, but once she saw we were committed to each other, it wasn't so bad.*[225] Even though cohabiting couples are not conforming to the ideal lifestyle preached, clergy will still give pastoral care where it is needed. *I feel so much of this issue falls into the blurred area of pastoral care where guidelines are often made to be broken.*[226]

Cohabitation as a lifestyle can lead to multiple relationships but unlike the case where one partner coming for marriage has been divorced, previous cohabiting relationships are not in the public domain: *discussion of previous relationships relies on information being volunteered by the partner concerned.*[227] Where they have had other relationships before their current one, *they may have been involved all sorts of abuses or wrongdoing and this may come out in the marriage preparation. We do try to cover that. If there have been other relationships and they haven't worked out, we look at that because this brings us to the whole idea of whether somebody is mature*

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[221] C004: Roman Catholic.
[222] C025: Methodist/Liberal.
[223] C022: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[224] A Roman Catholic priest commented that in a previous parish, there was a large but itinerant gypsy population, many illiterate, and no way of holding a six-week marriage preparation course. They would often come and 'want to be done legal and proper' at very short notice (C003: Roman Catholic).
[225] C014: Anglican/Mainstream (C025: Methodist/Liberal-Mainstream expressed a similar view).
[226] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[227] An acquaintance who moved to Harrogate recently after a 'particularly messy divorce' (sic) subsequently became engaged to a partner from a strong Methodist family and married in a local Methodist Church. It emerged that he had not actually been married to his previous partner. Whereas all couples approach marriage with a certain amount of previous history, this is an example of how cohabitation may possibly lead to a less than honest attitude and previous relationships glossed over.

enough to make that commitment.[228] The experience of clergy is that these discussions can generate feelings of guilt, introducing psychological problems to be overcome, often in the female partner: *the problem is always to recognise the levels of involvement when couple or one partner has lived in another relationship, it is important for the commitment to that relationship to have been released.*[229] By overcoming these residual difficulties, clergy can help couples to enter marriage openly and honestly: *If I am stood there as God's representative, I have to be easy that these people are making their promises with integrity.*[230]

Through their conversations with couples, clergy try to understand why couples are prepared to cohabit and reluctant to marry. Part of the answer reveals a resistance to the notion of traditional marriage amongst younger people in that: *some are determined to prove they can resist the tradition of courtship and marriage.*[231] The obvious practical reasons are well known. However, several clergy raised the cost of the wedding itself as a factor (slightly surprising since Harrogate is relatively affluent): *in cases I have dealt with the main reason for cohabiting is claimed to be the expense of a wedding and an inability to finance this. I have not yet encountered a cohabiting couple with no intention to get married ever.*[232] The motivation for a large wedding may not come from the couple themselves: *family pride is a strong factor, there being more loss of face in a 'poor' do than not being married at all.*[233] None of these factors were deemed insurmountable: one respondent qualified his response by suggesting that *even church fees can be excessive, though usually affordable in a church that does not provide bells, choir etc.*[234]

Cohabitation has become normative to the extent that clergy may be suspicious of couples apparently not living together: *I do get occasions when they do give separate addresses and I have to say, it is so unusual I begin to wonder whether they have even been on holiday together, what is their experience of each other. I think to myself, am I trying to make a serious point when I just want them to test out the quality of their*

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[228] C003: Roman Catholic.
[229] C025: Methodist/Evangelical.
[230] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[231] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.
[232] C028: ONC/Evangelical.
[233] C030: ONC/Evangelical.
[234] C031: ONC/Evangelical.

relationship.[235] A measure of how far clergy have already adjusted their approach comes from an Anglican, who relates that *last year I did a wedding where because of strong Christian conviction, they had never lived together. I found it a very sad, almost strange experience! I had to adjust my whole approach because they were so very different from the vast majority who normally cohabit. There was something that was ethically much more in the Christian tradition, yet so rare it had become completely unusual.*[236] A Roman Catholic priest added his own observation that *in the past two years, I believe three couples, genuinely, had not been living together. One, from a staunch Catholic family was a teacher. There was a very strong parental influence, but being a teacher would have made her conscious of a need to set an example.*[237] The relative rarity of couples living apart has prompted other clergy to highlight the fact that *it tends overwhelmingly to be in the context of church families. They are very much the exception and people now ask the question 'Why aren't they living together?' rather than the other way round.*[238] Occasionally, someone *will say 'this is special. I have decided to walk from my mother's home and get married, because that's what it is about'.*[239]

A few clergy may be prepared to refuse to marry a couple who are known to be cohabiting, though this is now unusual, and can lead to some difficult situations: *you get situations where for example, close friends approach you about marrying their children and they are cohabiting and you question what you should do about that kind of situation.*[240]

4.2.4.2 Pastoral Care and Marriage Outreach

The clergy sample accepted the need for a programme of post-marriage pastoral care (**2.9(a)**), though this is not without practical problems. One element of post-marriage care could include services of rededication of marriage vows (**2.9(b)**). *This has been a very constructive use of the church. I do special services during National Marriage Week: I'm not sure what the congregation expect but I include a renewal of marriage vows. The first time I did this, I was very taken by how many other people were moved*

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[235] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[236] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[237] C004: Roman Catholic.
[238] C027: Methodist/Liberal/Radical.
[239] C006: Anglican/Mainstream.
[240] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.

and that rather made me think yes it is a good thing, to give people the opportunity without it having to be their wedding anniversary, or to admit having been through a bad patch.[241]

The survey showed majority in favour, only (4/27) clergy were not certain or disagreed with the proposal that married couples may talk through some of the practicalities of married life, leaving the clergy to concentrate on the faith issues (**2.9(c)**). Another is to have combined sessions with other churches: to be effective, this would probably require a move away from the full marriage preparation on demand to a pre-marriage course plus a local session to sort out the particular arrangements for the wedding itself. This approach is explored in Chapter 8.

It is the personal contact, often confidential knowledge that enables pastoral care to achieve the desired end, but the church family also has a role: *I recall a young couple who drifted into cohabitation. The girl was a regular churchgoer and the church family kept contact, encouraged the girl to remain within the fellowship. They are about to get married.*[242] *I find that couples begin to be serious about their relationship when children arrive: they want to make some sort of promise to one another, in public, though not necessarily in church. I see this as a form of outreach ministry: years ago, one would have probably rejected such couples.*[243]

The over-riding philosophy in approaching pastoral care is that *pastoral problems are specific to individuals, not necessarily life-style.*[244] *I start where people are. That's the whole basis. I hope to lead them on: I wouldn't like to use the word Liberal but I'm pastorally sensitive, for what people need.*[245] Pastoral care comes to the fore when there are extenuating circumstances that prevent a couple from marrying, such as the anecdote of a *young man who is terminally ill, moves in with his girlfriend who is caring for him and his condition excludes the possibility of marriage 'in time'.*[246] This can also arise w*here divorce is impossible because of mental health grounds.*[247] The issue of older couples living together re-emerges: *I can think of an elderly couple who*

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[241] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[242] C029: ONC/Evangelical.
[243] C018: Methodist/Evangelical.
[244] C017: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[245] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[246] C020: Methodist/Evangelical.
[247] C006: Anglican/Evangelical.

lived together (largely for financial reasons). When the man became ill, the church was able to support them and expressed care towards the woman when her partner died. They both found the fellowship of the church a great help and comfort.[248]

Conversations with couples soon after they have married are more on the basis of friendship: *I normally say to couples when they have been married is that it does mean that the person who marries you is available always, not just in a crisis.*[249] More often, unless there is a particular pastoral need, o*ne of the things we don't do is marriage follow-up. Marriage is a huge right of passage and its fine if you are part of the church, but in general, we don't help people afterwards. Rededication of marriage vows is a possibility but in a way that's almost too formal. If they don't come to the church, you lose contact anyway.*[250]

Adult confirmation, also, has occasionally provided an opportunity for pastoral outreach: *an elderly man in the church came forward for confirmation. The Diocesan conformation card we give them lists rules and regulations. He came to me and said 'I think we need to have a chat because it says here that I am expected to uphold Christian marriage. We are not married but would like to be'. If he hadn't come to me, I would have assumed that they were married.*[251]

4.2.5 Alternative Liturgies

If the church concludes that its approach to the changing social order demands a response, then it follows that the marriage liturgy may also need updating: *I feel the structure is right, but in many cases, the words don't apply.*[252]

Whereas many clergy have found a need to adapt their marriage preparation to suit couples already living together, (17/27) disagreed with the proposition that 'The marriage liturgy should be extended to accommodate couples already cohabiting', (**2.10**). Of the (6/27) who agreed that some revision may be necessary, all were Anglican or Methodist mostly from Liberal traditions. This is a reflection of the

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[248] C029: ONC/Evangelical.
[249] C025: Methodist/Liberal-Mainstream.
[250] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.
[251] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[252] C028: ONC/Evangelical.

inconsistencies that can arise when a couple already living together, sometimes with a family, present themselves for marriage, making promises for events that have already taken place.

The responses from the clergy focussed on three particular areas, separation of the civil and religious parts of the wedding, the potential for a Betrothal liturgy and Baptism liturgy in the context of parents not married.

4.2.5.1 Civil Marriage Plus Church Blessing

There was strong support for continuing to incorporate the civil marriage promises within the marriage liturgy, (17/29) disagreeing with the proposition that 'Church marriage should be replaced by civil marriage plus a church blessing' (**2.5**). *The concept of having a single ceremony is probably too firmly embedded in our culture to change. On the continent, there is a bureaucratic separation; marriage is regarded as being made up of two parts, civil and then religious, that the two make a whole. Many couples do marry in a Register Office, but the bit they really want is the church part. The Register Office is a necessity, but they come to church because they want to. To me, it is important that, in church weddings, the two are kept together.*[253]

A separation of the civil and religious parts of the wedding ceremony would give clergy flexibility: *couples come to be married in church because it's the right thing to do (those who wish to express the religious aspect would come anyway). If the separation takes away from the church the need to be Registrars, you are then free to expand the religious aspects rather than tailor them to the legal requirements.*[254] However, this raises other potential problems: *firstly, marriage preparation becomes very difficult since there could be a significant interval between the Register Office wedding and going to the church. If one partner is in the Forces, serving overseas, there could be a delay of several months. There could be various practical reasons why they couldn't live together as husband and wife: they get married in March and then properly 'married' in church in December. Secondly, by not keeping the vows and promises and blessing within a single liturgy, we would loose the wholeness that is there. The church service is a blessing of a wedding that has already taken place*

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[253] C026: Methodist/Liberal-Radical (C003: Roman Catholic expressed a similar view).
[254] C029: ONC/Evangelical.

but it is not a wedding.[255] Some situations may be resolved through the introduction of 'Celebrated Relationship', discussed in Chapter 8.

There is understandable unease at any prospect the follow a continental model: *I am not sure how much further it would get you. Those who you would really rather not get married in church will not want to bother you afterwards. If they do, all you are being asked is to say a prayer for them. The bigger challenge comes with the remarriage of divorcees. The heart of the church marriage is the exchange of vows. The Anglican Church has offered divorcees the option of coming to church to recommit their vows and to receive a prayer of blessing. The only thing we refused them was the legal document.*[256] (By agreement with the incumbent, this has now changed).

Some Anglican clergy are concerned not to dilute the wedding service: *I always say to people who come to me and ask for a blessing that I would much rather take the wedding, is there no way we can do it here? In the Anglican Church, the couple marry each other: my role really is to make sure they are doing it according to the liturgy and give them God's blessing.*[257] *I do question the whole idea about being able to bless something and not to be able to carry out the wedding. I don't have a problem separating the civil bit from the religious, but if the reason for us giving only a blessing in church is because we won't marry certain people, I do have a problem.*[258]

The act of making a public commitment is seen as important, but not always in the traditional way. Many weddings are now held in private venues and ceremonies are not open to the general public. Consequently, the witness to the wedding, apart from the Registrar, is by those specifically invited and risks marriage itself being privatised. *One of the things the Christian Gospel needs to be saying to our current society is that this privatisation and do whatever we like in the privacy of our own homes is no good, because that affects society in terms of family life.*[259] However, there was also a note of caution sounded over many couples' approach to church wedding in that many

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[255] C018: Methodist/Evangelical. In Holland, there are tax benefits in being married: in particular, they can go on the council list for housing. Committed Christians, catholic or protestant, would not consider themselves to be properly married by the civil ceremony alone.
[256] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[257] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[258] C014: Anglican/Mainstream.
[259] C027: Methodist/Liberal.

church marriages are, in reality, *no more than civil marriages in a more aesthetic environment, and have no real Christian commitment by the participants.*[260]

Another question clergy have not yet had to face is *what do you do when you have got a cohabiting couple: could there be a service of 'blessing'.*[261]

4.2.5.2 Betrothal

There are parallels have cohabitation and betrothal in that both converge towards a marriage-like relationship. At an academic level, there have been proposals for a liturgy to accommodate couples during their preparation for marriage.[262] However, the proposition 'A betrothal liturgy should be introduced for couples who wish to 'marry' before making a final commitment' (**2.11**), receives little support from the clergy in this survey: (20/29) disagreed and (7/29) were not certain (but several admitted they were not familiar with the concept, associating betrothal with its biblical connotations). The intention is to enable church to confer God's blessing on to a couple at their engagement or calling of first banns, sanctioning their 'coming together'.[263] In the interview discussions, I presented betrothal as having the potential to strengthen the meaning of marriage from within the Christian tradition by involving the church family as well as immediate family and friends with a couple intent on living together whilst seeking marriage. The responses varied: *there is a different dialogue to be had with those who want to be honourable but are entering a really serious relationship. It is unlikely they need a ceremony to actually confirm anything beyond what they already know about each other.*[264] *It wasn't so long ago in the history of this country where making the vows and the coming together under one roof was only by marriage. If the marriage service is a confirmation of what is already in being, it takes us close to the traditional idea of betrothal.*[265]

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[260] C015: Methodist/Evangelical.
[261] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[262] See Chapter 3.
[263] Betrothal liturgies are to be found in pre-Middle Ages traditions such as the Coptic Rite, in which there were separate rites for betrothal and marriage. This practice continued through to the medieval churches and their acceptance of 'trial marriages'. Searle and Stevenson, *Marriage Liturgy*, 78-9.
[264] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.
[265] C005: Anglican/Mainstream.

Close to betrothal comes the concept of 'trial marriage': the general reaction was to overwhelmingly reject any such suggestion as impractical and meaningless in the present culture.

4.2.5.3 Baptism

Baptism expressly implies a conventional Christian family home. However, there was little enthusiasm for the proposition that 'The liturgy for Baptism should be expanded to accommodate cohabitation' (**3.9**): (19/27) disagreed with a further (6/27) not certain. *The willingness of parents in these situations to bring children for baptism is coloured also by the perception society has of the church and the whole culture of any particular congregation the congregation. This comes down to attitudes within congregations as well as a biblical theology of marriage.*[266] At a theological level, *it raises the danger that you focus on the relationship of the parents, rather than that of the child, before God.*[267] One of the practical difficulties is circumvented in Anglican and Methodist registers that now record the parents' names separately on the assumption that *mothers and fathers will not necessarily share the same surname.*[268]

There is particular concern when the parents are under pressure from usually older members of the family to conform to a convention they themselves do not really support. *One thing I am trying to develop is an alternative to Baptism where there is no clear Christian commitment. The difficulty is that as soon as you start to explain this, parents think that anything other than Baptism is second best. It is a real dilemma and I find it very difficult to refuse people Baptism for their children. I may go round several times to talk about it. It is not me imposing a whole set of rules, but my concern is that they should not engage in something that they are not comfortable with.*[269]

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[266] C023: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[267] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[268] C013: Anglican/Liberal.
[269] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

If the sample questioned are in any way typical of the wider church, then clergy are clearly well aware of the impact cohabitation is making, both socially and theologically. They are already adapting their pastoral role, but in doing so, are risking having to compromise some deeply held beliefs. The 'Theorists' identified by Le Tissier (see Chapter 1 n. 29) are no longer to be found, except, perhaps, amongst some of the more rigorous evangelical clergy: most clergy recognise that cohabitation is now a way of life, though they may be less clear how to deal with it. There is some concern that couples are forced into cohabitation for economic reasons, including the protracted time-scales that often accompany arranging a wedding.

Most clergy are sympathetic to the proposition that marriage preparation may be made more effective, though few, if any, have countenanced reaching out to couples not marrying in their own churches. Lack of resources, time as well as money, are frequently put forward as reasons for not expanding their current activity in this area.

Given their overall conservatism, it may not be surprising that few clergy in the survey see the development of betrothal to meet contemporary needs as a means of bringing together cohabitation and marriage.

The views of the clergy are balanced against those of their congregations in the next chapter. The combined results of the two surveys have helped shape the sociological and theological development of cohabitation in Chapters 6 and 7 and the inferences drawn will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 5

Congregation Survey: Attitudes to Cohabitation and Marriage

As the clergy survey neared completion, it became apparent that a large body of opinion in the church was missing, that of the congregations. A decision was taken to expand the survey to include congregations from churches in the same locality as the clergy survey. Congregation members are not, for the most part, 'theologically engaged' but may be expected to give a Christian response to the social attitudes of the society in which they live and work and how these are regarded by their own or other churches. Congregations are integral to the church and as individuals and collectively, are involved in pastoral care on many issues such as cohabitation. The findings of the congregation survey are summarised numerically in Appendix V and discussed below, incorporating additional verbal and written comments received (in this context, the quoted views expressed are from individuals and may not, therefore, reflect the views of congregations as a whole).

With the vastly increased numbers involved, the congregation survey represented an entirely different logistical problem that is described in detail below. The questionnaires, whilst covering the same broad areas, were slightly different: some of the questions were not appropriate to both clergy and congregations in exactly the same form as cohabitation may be seen from quite different perspectives. Nevertheless, the two surveys have been constrained in order to present the results in a common format.

The value of the survey is that congregation members form a link between society and the church, between the secular world and the Christian community.

5.1 Congregation Survey Logistics

As with the clergy survey, the congregation survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire, inviting responses to the questions supported by written comments and where possible, followed up by interviews with a number of volunteer respondents. The questionnaire itself is reproduced in Appendix III: it was shortened and simplified

to make it more acceptable to a lay group, but contained similar caveats to ensure confidentiality. The style of questioning is similar to that of the clergy survey, but the questions themselves differ to take account of the different experiences of clergy and congregations. However, the results of the two surveys are presented in a common format to promote comparability. Because this survey was conducted on a much larger scale, it required a different approach to achieve the level of confidentiality expected by the respondents. A major difference was that replies were anonymous by design and discussions could only be held with respondents who volunteered to identify themselves.

Fourteen congregations were selected from churches within Harrogate, chosen to represent each of the denominational groups in the different areas of the town, according to the distribution of churches.[1] Not all congregations represented in the Clergy Survey were included, essentially to limit the quantity of data to be collected and analysed: the denominational groups were Roman Catholic (3), Anglican (4), Methodist (4) and Other Non-Conformist (3).

The congregations were approached initially through the clergy in order to discuss the questionnaire and establish assurances on confidentiality. Some clergy expressed reservations that the congregational survey may prove to be divisive but many of their fears were allayed following discussion of the logistics of distribution and analyses of results. That said, one clergyman did in fact decline to permit my survey to be carried out within his congregation on the grounds that cohabitation was already a sensitive issue there and did not wish to risk stimulating debate that could provoke irreconcilable differences of opinion. The decision not to include this particular congregation was taken after consultations between the clergyman, senior church officers, and myself. This in itself is an endorsement of the need for discussion of this issue.

Having first obtained consent through the clergy to carry out the survey at each of the selected churches, presentations were made to church representatives to explain the

[1] See Appendix I.
The issue of confidentiality was helped by the two surveys being carried out independently, minimising the possibility of any breach of confidentiality between clergy and congregation.

intentions and expectations of the survey as well as some of the technical aspects. The issue of confidentiality was always high in the order of questioning, in particular that neither congregations nor individuals should be identified. As with the analysis of the clergy responses, assurances could be given that views expressed individually or collectively by any particular congregation would not identified other than by their denominational group.

The questionnaires were distributed with the help of Church Wardens, Stewards and other officers (in some cases, the clergy themselves assisted) and a 'posting box' given to each church for the bulk collection of completed questionnaires. Replies were therefore returned to me collectively from each congregation. In all the selected churches, the survey was highlighted and endorsed through pulpit announcements: this capitalised on the clergy survey that had already generated a background of interest in my work.

As with the Clergy Survey, the questionnaire was headed with a statement of intent and a declaration that the confidentiality of respondents would not be compromised. This confidentiality extended to individuals as well as churches and congregations and to help achieve this, all presentations and comments were made on a denominational group or theological tradition basis. Though a reader with local knowledge may attempt to guess the source of a particular piece of information, this would not be confirmed.

The four sections into which the Congregation Survey is divided are headed 'Views on Marriage', 'Cohabitation and Church Life', 'Ways Forward' and 'Further Comments'. Being aimed at a different audience, the sections are headed differently to those in the Clergy Survey though many of the individual questions are essentially similar, as are the styles of questioning. Many respondents volunteered additional written comments. Not all of those who identified themselves were interviewed: care was taken to interview respondents representative of each denominational group, based upon the 'quality' of their response in terms of additional comments, age group and marital status.

Inevitably, there have been some criticisms of the questionnaire, such as one respondent who found it *quite difficult to answer from a single person's point of view, having never been in a relationship.*[2] In addition, there was some concern that closely related issues such a pre-marital sex and same-sex relationships were not considered. A few respondents found that some of the categories defining their profile such as 'theological tradition' were difficult or unnecessarily restrictive and others criticised the questionnaire for questions that were inappropriate to their denomination or that they could not adequately express a non-denominational view. These objections were few in number and counterbalanced by others who found the questionnaire both challenging and thought provoking.

5.1.1 Response Rates

Overall, there was a good response to the Congregation Survey. In view of the differences in character between the clergy and congregation surveys, the response rates merit further discussion.

A total of 1430 questionnaires were distributed to the fourteen congregations, based on 'best estimates' of average attendances plus about 20% for safety: allowances were made for churches that held several services during each Sunday, to which some worshippers may go to more than once. From the questionnaires given to the various churches, 414 replies were received together plus 197 questionnaires returned unused.

On a denominational basis, the numbers returned were

Roman Catholic	- 137	
Anglican	- 99	
Methodist	- 118	
Other Non-Conformist	- 60	Total 414.

The nominal response rate of 33% based on 1233 surveys actually given out is probably satisfactory for this type of exercise. It is unlikely that all unused

[2]265: Anglican, unmarried female, 25-34.

questionnaires were returned (some churches did not return any unused questionnaires) so the number given out was probably less than 1233 and therefore the actual response rate is almost certainly higher than my estimate, though not quantifiable.

For some congregations, the figures are known with a degree of confidence:-

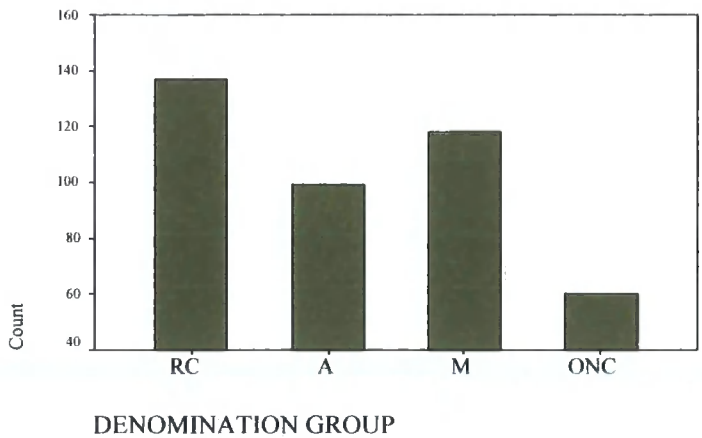
Congregation A (Anglican):
100 supplied 42 returned unused 31 replies (53.4%)
Congregation B (Anglican):
80 supplied 7 returned unused 35 replies (45.9%)
Congregation C (Roman Catholic):
340 supplied 8 returned unused 87 replies (26.2%)
Congregation D (Roman Catholic):
200 supplied 43 returned unused 23 replies (14.6%)
Congregation E (Other Non-Conformist):
120 supplied 29 returned unused 33 replies (36.2%)

A higher response rate is always hoped for, within the limits and uncertainties of the survey, the database of 414 responses covers a wide range of personal experience and opinion.

Though the Congregation Survey produced a much larger numerical response, given the voluntary nature of the survey, there is no way of knowing how far the returns reflect all sections of the congregations. Also the anonymity offered to respondents means that where attributes such as marital status, gender or age group have not been declared, there is no way of establishing the data unless the missing values can be interpreted from other comments from the questionnaire. Invariably, there was data missing from several of the replies. Unless the 'missing values' could be inferred from statements elsewhere in the questionnaire, they were usually omitted from the graphical presentations.

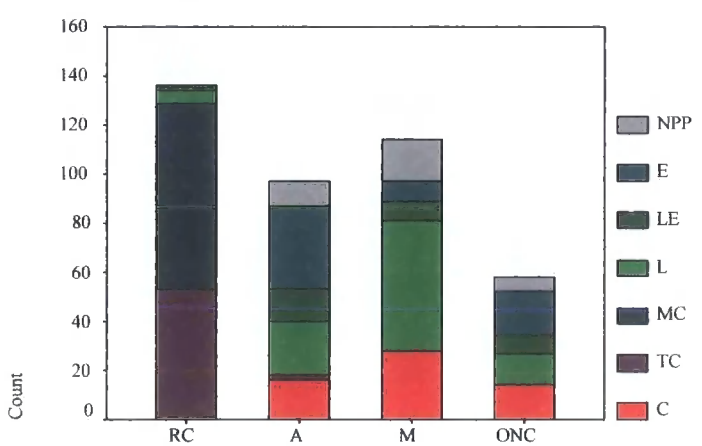
The principle axes on which the results are presented are 'denomination group' and 'theological tradition', as for the clergy survey, plus three additional axes, 'marital status', 'gender' and 'age group', specific to the congregation survey

The overall response as a function of Denomination Group is



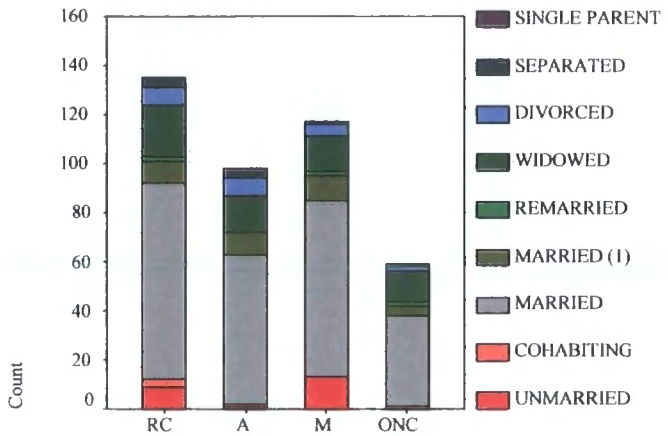
Each group embraces three or four congregations in an effort to ascertain a representative response. Congregations in the Other Non-Conformist (ONC) churches tend to be smaller than for the mainstream churches and produced a proportionately smaller response.

Within each group, there is to be found a range of theological tradition:



The abbreviations for denomination are as for the clergy survey, but the specification of theological tradition has been expanded.[3] As may be expected, there is a much broader representation outside of the Roman Catholic Church.

The analysis of marital status shows a majority of the respondents are married, the next highest number being those who are widowed, common to all denominational groups:



(1) Cohabited before marriage.

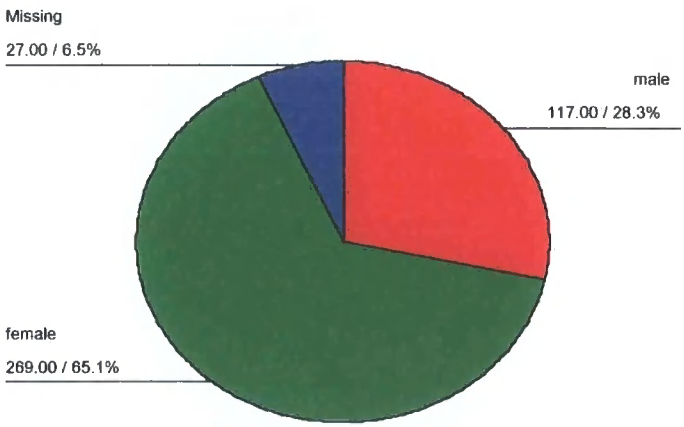
Few of those currently unmarried declared an expectation of marriage. An even smaller number admitted to cohabiting (interestingly, Roman Catholics).[4] Contrary to expectation given the high proportion of remarriages in non-conformist and some Anglican churches, the number of respondents remarried is also small.

The gender split across all denominations shows a bias towards female respondents in accord with most church-goer's experience:-

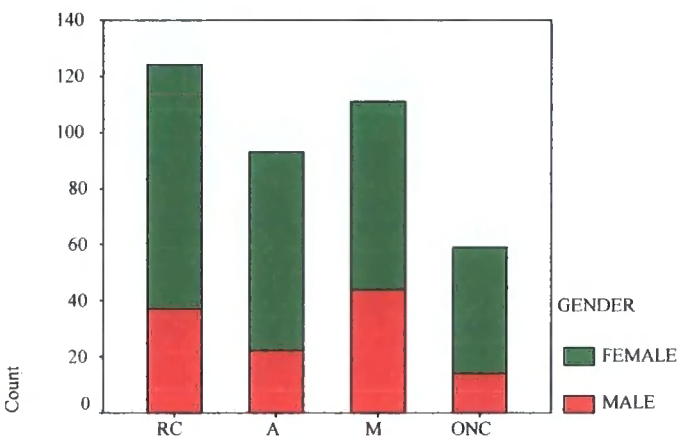
[3] Theological Tradition – Congregation Survey

C	Conservative.	L	Liberal
E	Evangelical.	LE	Liberal-Evangelical
TC	Traditional Catholic.	NPP	No Particular Persuasion
MC	Modern Catholic.		

[4] I know of couples who are cohabiting, but have either declined to reply to the survey or chosen not to reveal their status.

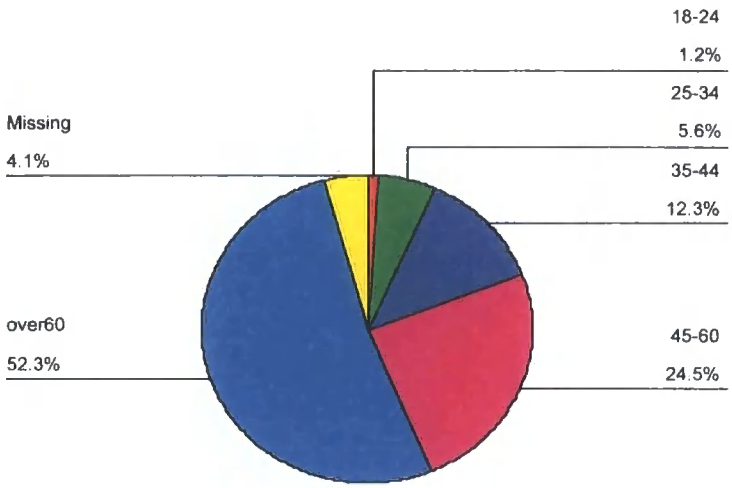


This data has been re-plotted as a function of denomination group, omitting the missing data:-

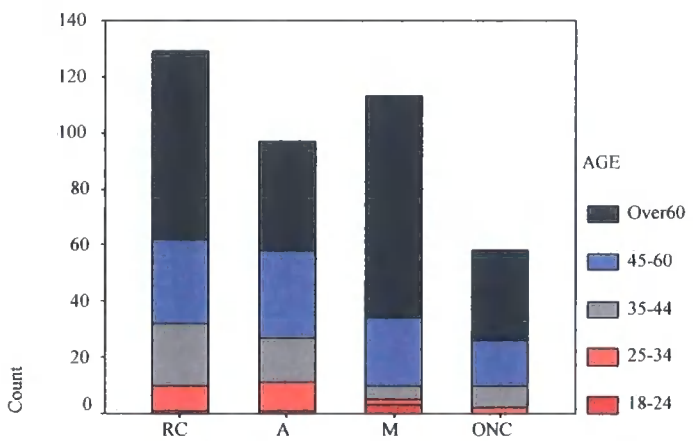


Virtually all the respondents claimed to be regular worshippers and all but a handful, at the church where they received the questionnaire. Exceptions occurred: a typical example would be where a respondent is married to a member of another denomination, choosing to worship together at one church. This accounts for some of the occasional inconsistencies between denominational group and theological tradition.

When the age profile for all respondents, irrespective of denominational group, by number and percentage is plotted, the image is of mostly elderly congregations:-



When the 'missing values' are omitted from the database, the age profiles show the predominance of respondents over the age of 45, particularly in Methodist and Other Non-Conformist congregations.



Profiles for individual congregations are not presented to avoid any possibility of untoward comparisons being made.

5.1.2 Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis and presentation of the data is similar to that used for the clergy survey. All data from the questionnaires has been coded and entered on to an SPSS database from which specific correlations and comparisons may be made. Quotations are subject to similar editing and quoted anonymously, according to their denomination

group, theological tradition, marital status, gender, and age group. The style of questioning is similar to that for the clergy survey, requiring answers 'Yes', 'No' or 'Sometimes' to specific questions, or the level of agreement to particular statements.

The results are presented under similar headings to the clergy survey, hence, again, the not in the same order as on the questionnaire. The questions themselves are again reproduced with correspondence to the figures in Appendix V (though some of the longer ones are condensed).

5.2 Congregation Survey Results

The survey results are presented numerically in Appendix V: the discussion below presents an analysis of these results, supported by the additional written and oral comments.

5.2.1 Cohabitation and Lifestyle

There was an overwhelming response in support of 'Marriage is God's preferred way for couples to live' (**B1(a)**).[5] At the same time, a need to be in a quasi-permanent, faithful relationship, whether cohabitation or marriage, was common to all age groups: *We love the sinners but not the sin. Cohabitation is a fact and cannot be ignored, much as we would wish to.*[6] *As an older person, bereaved, I look forward to meeting a lady who I could be a close friend with. She would need to be a Christian but at my age, marriage would seem inappropriate.*[7]

There is an interesting response to the statement 'the church should accept cohabitation as part of today's lifestyle' (**D2(e)**). A majority (236/385) over all denomination groups were inclined to disagree. Within the traditions, conservatives, evangelicals, and traditional-Catholics mostly disagree with the proposition but liberals and modern Catholics are clearly split on this issue. One Catholic respondent has pointed out that doctrine is not at issue but that *cohabitation undermines the*

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[5] References to the questionnaire parallel the style developed for the clergy survey.
[6] L171: Roman Catholic/Traditional/male/married/over-60.
[7] L302: Methodist/Liberal/Widowed/male/over-60.
Respondents are referenced anonymously, according to their denomination, theological tradition, gender, marital status and age. The code number corresponds to the congregation survey database. A double '//' indicates data is missing.

'humanity' of human beings and damages their relationship with God.[8] At the same time, there is a need to accommodate both doctrine and secular values: *that doesn't mean I do not love friends who cohabit. I accept them because that is where they are.*[9] *God did not say change the rules to suit the sin of the day.*[10] *We should make the most of being in love. Life is short. The church's view should be to accept the way people want to live. Living together should be an open option when 'engaged'.*[11]

More than half (236/371) of all respondents disagreed with the proposition 'The church should accept cohabitation only where there is a commitment to marry' (**D2(d)**), particularly from Liberals and Modern Catholics. What they are saying is *that the church must be open to all, whatever their situation, but at the same time try to influence them towards marriage.*[12] An Anglican confirmed *we don't judge or turn people away so we must accept them, whatever their status.*[13]

In response to 'If you are **single** with an expectation of marriage, would you be prepared to cohabit' (**B2**), a substantial proportion (38/50) said they would not be prepared to cohabit, whether or not formally engaged. When the response is analysed as a function of age, the result is heavily skewed: (5/8) of the 18 to 34 year olds would be prepared to cohabit. However, the proportion falls to (3/34) for the 45 to over-60 group. This is slightly unexpected, given the comment above and if one considers that many of these older respondents are widowed or divorced and may have been anticipated to show a more realistic view of their expectations.

Debate between cohabitation and marriage extends across all denominations and traditions with comments such as *marriage is a sacrament and should be protected.*[14] At the same time, *cohabitation can be a way of finding out about each other, but once married, couples should be prepared for lifetime commitment, with all that entails.*[15] Several respondents expressed their difficulty in holding to the marriage tradition,

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[8] L118: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/unmarried/35-44.
[9] L292: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/45-60.
[10] L352: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/over-60.
[11] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[12] L173: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/over-60.
[13] L257: Anglican/Liberal/female/divorced/45-60.
[14] L368: Anglican/Traditional/female/widowed/45-60.
[15] L281: Anglican/NPP/female/married/45-60.

challenged by the view that *if you subscribe to creation as truth, then God was concerned with companionship. The first mention of marriage appears to be Genesis 19:14. Are we teaching as doctrines the commandments of men?*[16] Strong opposition to cohabitation came especially from the sacramental and evangelical traditions: *if people are committed Christians the question of cohabitation doesn't arise: it is fornication.*[17] *Cohabitation can never be justified, whatever the circumstances. It is contrary to what the Lord intends for us.*[18] *Cohabitation is ALWAYS wrong. People should do what the church teaches and not what their friends are doing.*[19] Many of these reactions stem from a concern is that marriage is under threat from a trend towards alternative, more informal lifestyles: *the orthodoxy of Catholic doctrine is correct. The unpopularity of this reality is merely a symptom of the post-modern secularism. I have yet to meet a person who genuinely believed that the church is incorrect.*[20]

Tolerance for cohabitation was found within the liberal tradition: in many cases, this has come about through family circumstances that have caused respondents to modify their views: *I believe strongly in marriage. I have one son happily cohabiting but hope they will eventually marry.*[21] Tolerance may be tempered by a feeling of resignation for what has become common practice *but that does not mean it is the best preparation for marriage.*[22] There was some appreciation of the inadequacy of cohabitation to wholly meet a couple's needs: *I have been married twice and cohabited both times, but feel strongly since recommitting my life to Christ that marriage is God's design. But it is a fallen world and a lot more grace should abound.*[23]

Every individual's experience of life is unique: *I had a troubled upbringing. My parents divorced when I was 16 (my father had a serious drink problem, then lots of infidelity). When I left school, I was actually a church-goer and I kept it up for a time. Then I socialised more, having a few serious relationships, falling in love, happy*

[16] L257: Anglican/Liberal/female/divorced45-60.
[17] L253: Anglican/vangelical/male/married/over-60.
[18] L047: ONC/Evangelical/female/married/45-60.
[19] L099: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/over-60.
[20] L118: Roman Catholic/Traditional/male/unmarried/35-44.
[21] L309: Methodist/Liberal/female/widowed/over-60.
[22] L324: Methodist/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[23] L061: ONC/Evangelical//remarried//.

distractions free from the family baggage. I had never lived with anybody although I did have a couple of quite lengthy relationships where I felt I was in love. Then I met -- and it wasn't very long before he asked me to marry him. I said let's wait at least a year, because we had known each other only a few months. I couldn't understand that I could be madly in love with somebody that would last for the rest of your life: I'd been in love with other people and it hadn't lasted. Maybe that's a warning.[24] This respondent strikes an accord with the clergy-person who questioned how a divorcee could know that a new relationship was going to last.[25]

This brings the argument to cohabitation as a means of getting to know one's partner sufficiently to make a lifetime commitment: *that's a good thing because you do need to find out as much about the person you are going to live with before you get married.*[26] From the age profile in the survey, most respondents probably formed their relationships when cohabitation was not part of the culture. In response to the statement 'Cohabitation is now part of the process of getting to know each other' **(B1(d))**, there was a diversity of opinion across all denominations. The biggest groups are found within the traditional catholics, conservatives, and evangelicals. Liberals and modern catholics are most likely to agree with the statement. Although the samples are not evenly distributed, there is a greater tendency to agree amongst younger respondents, the ratio changing from 3:2 for 18 to 24 year olds to 46:110 for the over-60s.

Several respondents suggested potential advantages in living together before marrying, in particular, getting to know your partner before you marry: *however much you love somebody, when it comes to day to day living, there are all sorts of things that you don't realise before you move in together. If you only ever see each other on a date, you never get a full impression of what they are really like as a partner. My children have all lived with somebody and then married them. I think that was very sensible.*[27] Attitudes such as this tended to be supported by direct experience: *I wouldn't want any of my children to get married straight from home. I'm glad they*

[24] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern-Liberal/female/married/35-44.
[25] C006: Anglican/Mainstream and C025: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical both expressed a similar view.
[26] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[27] L281:Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.

went away and shared their lives with other people, found out what suited them. All sorts of things come up in everyday life that you don't even think to enquire about before you marry and live with somebody. It would have been better if I'd lived with my husband before we got married. When we got married, I had a big shock because: he had this attitude that I didn't know about and the first few years were very difficult. Had I lived with him to start with, my expectations would have been more realistic.[28] Family experience may cause opinions to change: *had my daughter cohabited with her former husband she could have walked away instead of going through the agony of having to put up with his awful ways because they were married in church.*[29]

Two respondents reported in detail the consequences of not fully getting to know one's partner's true character through traditional courtship: *As soon as we got married, I sold my house, putting money in the bank. He became very aggressive, very violent. What I wanted was another adult around to help me raise the kids. It was a terrible mistake.*[30] Another commented on her daughter's marriage saying *her husband turned out to be very controlling, and I wonder if that would have come out if they had lived together; he was fanatical about money.*[31]

Attitudes become ever more acute when a marriage breaks down: *both my daughters wanted to stay at home until they got married. Now my youngest daughter's been hurt so badly in the fact that she is Christian herself. She's actually getting a divorce. I never dreamt of them cohabiting. I got married 'so long as you both shall live' and I expected my own family to do the same. It has completely changed my view. If she'd come and said I want to go and live with ---, I would have told her how I felt, but wouldn't have stopped her. Now I wish she had, she would have found out what he was like.*[32] *I certainly feel that you find out as much as possible about a person before you get married, because I do believe in long-term commitment, I think if you have difficulties, you should keep trying and go to counselling, do what you can to mend the marriage.*[33]

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[28] L281:Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[29] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[30] L145: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/divorced/45-60.
[31] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[32] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[33] L281:Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.

Several commented on tensions that can arise through changing work patterns: *we have friends where the father took time off work to fulfil the classic mother role as a carer. If the children are pre-school age, even school age, it is a full time job and one parent, it doesn't matter which, needs to be at home whilst the other goes out to work. Our friend's wife is a nurse: she can quite easily fit in evenings, while her husband is at home. In that situation, you can dovetail the home and work.*[34]

The survey revealed that (263/373) agreed and only (62/373) disagreed that 'There is too much emphasis on individual fulfilment to the detriment of marriage' (**B1(h)**). A level of about 70% was found across all theological traditions as well as within the denominational groups. This is one of the factors at the root of the tension caused by career commitments: *it doesn't tie in with marriage or parenthood. If everything is 'me', what happens about everybody else. Sometimes you've got to say 'we'll do this together', even if it is not strictly what either one of you would want to do.*[35]

In a broader context, respondents raised the importance of friendship in the process of getting to know each other: *whilst I disagree with cohabitation, it is important to be able to spend time together for prolonged periods, more than a few hours at a time (though that would almost certainly lead to premarital sex). I do not have children and cannot be sure that I would feel the same if it were my own children.*[36] There was caution that the development of friendship may not be separable from the sexual relationship: *you don't know a person 'til you live with them, but it changes the emphasis in getting to know each other into something more focussed on sexual attraction.*[37] Others saw sexual compatibility to be an important aspect of living together: *cohabitation may highlight sexual difficulties and save a lifetime of married frustration.*[38]

Whether or not to cohabit is very much a personal decision. A respondent's two children showed different ways of expressing their Christian commitment in their own relationships. One remained celibate and entered marriage in the traditional way, the

[34] L277:Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.
[35] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[36] L257: Anglican/Liberal/female/divorced/45-60.
[37] L252: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[38] L008: Methodist/liberal/married/female/45-60.

other was content to cohabit. Both expected a 'proper' wedding, though their parents had misgivings over the daughter who decided to cohabit: *unlike the older daughter, I don't think she had actually said to herself or anybody else, 'Christianity is important to me, it is going to affect the way I live'. The younger one had a very different idea of commitment and though she said she was a Christian, the older one didn't agree because it hadn't affected her standards in life. The older daughter suggested that her sister shouldn't have a church wedding because she hadn't accepted Christianity.*[39] This brings in the question whether the wedding defines marriage or is a confirmation of a relationship already established.

Concern for the implications and potential risks involved in living together were found mostly amongst those who were brought up to respect a different set of standards: *if they live together, they should get married. You are not committed. What do you do if it doesn't work out? Separate? It's a very important issue. There is a difference between living together and behaving as a committed Christian.* Whilst there is no consensus over cohabitation, most parents show concern: *it had worried me, but she was doing what any other person would do, and I had to accept that.*[40] Congregations tended to have reservations over cohabitation, irrespective of a couple's level of commitment. Those who accepted cohabitation realised the practicalities: *cohabiting with an intention to marry is fine by me but I respect those who go no further.* [41]

One question not asked of older married respondents in the questionnaire (because it is difficult to relocate one's circumstances) was 'If you have never cohabited, are there any circumstances you feel you might, and if so, what would those circumstances be?' *I believe that each person or couple must come to their own decision on marriage and cohabitation in terms of where they stand in terms of a Christian faith. As faith grows, these issues resolve themselves. It is at this point that the church family is best placed to help and encourage the leap of faith that is marriage.*[42]

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[39] L252: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[40] L253: Anglican/Evangelical/male/married/over-60.
[41] L206: Methodist/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[42] L249: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.

5.2.1.1 Cohabitation and Commitment

There was still a strong expectation across all mainstream denominations and age groups within the Christian community that 'In the C21, it is still realistic to make a lifetime commitment to one's partner' **(B1(b))**, with comments such as *I think marriage is the church's way for couples to live in long-term, lifetime committed responsible relationships.*[43] However, a note of caution was issued: *it is very difficult in this day and age. In the past, people were supported by their family. People move around much more now and there aren't the same ties.*[44] There was unease over the fragmentation of relationships that are linked individuals rather than couples, each wanting to reach their full potential rather than settle for marriage.[45]

The reaction of the over-60 age group is interesting because most of them would have married at a time when divorce carried social stigmas and a difficult marriage had to be endured. Nevertheless, for most of them, marriage worked: *If you have the opportunity to be married to someone sharing your beliefs, especially as regards children, you should go ahead and persevere.*[46]

There was a real sense that commitment is one of the protections surrounding marriage: *it's important in society for couples to make a long-term commitment to each other, preferably in marriage. Marriage has a long tradition, everyone knows what to expect of it, what husband and wife are to each other and so on. If you are religious, you want God's blessing on your marriage.*[47] Commitment also provides a major impetus to marry: *if there is a commitment, they will want to get married. For me it's a very logical thing: if you are not willing to get married, couples have to think very hard about what commitment they are willing to make, otherwise their relationship becomes very tangled.*[48]

Greater life expectancy has caused some respondents to question the ideal of a lifetime commitment: *I believe marriage was 'invented' when life expectancy was far shorter than it is today. I married at 19 and we stayed together for 25 years, but life is*

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[43] L262: Anglican/NPP/female/married/45-60.
[44] L281: Anglican/NPP/female/married/45-60.
[45] L395: ONC/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/45-60.
[46] L159: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/widowed/over-60.
[47] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[48] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.

long and a choice of partner made in my teens did not remain my choice in my 40s.[49] *Anyone who has grandparents who lived into their nineties must question the expectation of a lifetime commitment, with the knowledge that not so long ago, in many strata of society, a lifetime commitment may have been no more than fifteen years.*[50]

One of the reasons for cohabitation given is that *couples are frightened or unwilling to make a commitment. They expect that if anything goes wrong, they will have a legal battle, and of course, they don't. If your child is born out of wedlock, and the father's name is not on the birth certificate: there may be legal rights to work out. I don't know how you educate people to take responsibility for their actions.*[51] Doubts come through uncertainties over what commitment means: *Why do you have these doubts? If a couple is only living together, you obviously feel they have a lack of commitment.*[52]

There is a view that part of the problem over lifetime commitment is educational, that *we can and should encourage couples to gain a greater understanding of marriage and the true meaning of commitment, sadly lacking across society.*[53] Though marriage may be regarded as a universal right, there is an attitude that marriage within the Christian faith should be conducted with greater integrity: *you are on a different set of standards. When things go wrong, you should stick with it and get over the bad patches.*[54] *Yet Jesus admitted that lifelong commitment is a gift not found by everyone and divorce was necessary because we do not understand the meaning of love enough.*[55] There is a perception that *a lack of marital commitment mirrors a lack of religious commitment; they fall apart because this is what people do.*[56] This does raise the argument whether commitment as opposed to intent is total at the outset or something that grows over time: *it is harder for young people to be as committed*

[49] L105. Roman Catholic/Modern/female/separated/45-60.
[50] L145: Roman Catholic,Traditional/female/divorced/45-60.
[51] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[52] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[53] L408: ONC/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[54] L282: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[55] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern-Liberal/female/married/35-44.
[56] L252: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.

unless they have got the Holy Spirit acting within them and a secure spirituality. For me, commitment has evolved.[57]

5.2.1.2 Cohabitation and Relationship

There was a diverse response to the statement 'The quality of a relationship is more important than being married' (**B1(c)**), (160/373) in agreement, (150/373) disagreeing. The distributions in each of the denominational groups are similar as well as between males and females and within married respondents. As a generalisation, Conservative, Evangelical and Traditional Catholic respondents prioritise marriage, whereas the Liberals and Modern Catholics place more emphasis of the quality of the relationship.

In discussions of marital relationship, an element of self-sacrifice emerges: *marriage is a personal matter. Personal fulfilment should be sidelined on occasions to ensure that the other partner's happiness is maintained.*[58] *Marriage is not an easy option, but then life itself is not.*[59] There may be particular reasons why a couple choose not to marry, but lack of intention and commitment is seen as a big issue: *I presume that having started cohabiting, they decide there's no need to get married, particularly if they are not religious, They feel marriage offers nothing extra, so they don't bother with the formalities. A lot of people will say we are committed anyway so why bother with a piece of paper, but it's more than that, it's all the legal support (for a woman) that you don't have, if you are cohabiting.*[60] *When the norm is to live together, the excuse is to find out about each other and if we're not compatible, we separate. I don't agree with that because in marriage, people devote themselves to each other.*[61]

As hinted by some respondents above, a marriage relationship is perceived to be something that develops and changes over time as the family grows and spouses mature. The freedom with which we select our partners is in many ways observed to

[57] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern-Liberal/female/married/35-44.
[58] L277: Anglican/Liberal/female/married/35-45.
[59] L070: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/married/over-60.
[60] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[61] L252: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.

be flawed: *people choose their own partners and at 19, your eyes are clouded over by the first flush of love. If you're lucky, you stay together. My experience was that as I had the children, I matured but my partner wasn't able to come with me. He was my third child.*[62]

Within the context of relationship and commitment, several respondents interviewed accepted that a good relationship is not necessarily confined to marriage: *I believe it is much more important that two people cohabiting or married really love each other and try their best to live good Christian lives in the sight of God.*[63] It is then difficult to be too critical of cohabitation: *provided there exists the same standards that one would expect to exist within a Christian marriage. What are the real grounds for objection to those who cohabit and uphold the same sanctities of a true Christian relationship between a man and wife?*[64]

As with some clergy, several respondents have found their views on marriage challenged when their offspring have decided to cohabit, when economic reasons take precedence over an intention to marry. From a younger respondent comes *I think the church should consider the changing economic picture. I would love to own my property but know that I could never afford to myself. I will need to cohabit before I get married.*[65] The usual arguments over housing costs may be exacerbated by the issue of education debts acquired by young people following on from their university courses: *our daughter is living with a boyfriend. It is a situation that suits everyone and helps them eventually to get on the property ladder.*[66]

There is some sympathy for couples who, for their own reasons make a conscious decision not to marry: *in many ways they are more committed to each other than many married couples. Maybe by not going to church, they see it as hypocritical to get married in church, but see no reason to get married outside church either. In many ways, they are more married than many married people. They just haven't been through the process of getting married.*[67]

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[62] L145: Roman Catholic//divorced/female/45-60.
[63] L137: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/widowed/over-60.
[64] L011: Methodist/Evangelical/married/male//.
[65] L152: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/unmarried/18-24.
[66] L138: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/45-60.
[67] L277,301: Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.

Relationship involves responsibility, and this can show up in unexpected ways: A respondent volunteered the experience of a young man who wouldn't tell anybody they were engaged until he had asked her father. *How old fashioned is that! He'd already 'had her' so far as his parents were concerned.*[68] What was overlooked here was the man accepting his new responsibilities. A respondent who works for the army brought a different dimension to the discussion: *in the past, the Army encouraged marriage because you then had a known dependant. If you are not married, which girlfriend is the dependant? Some of our junior soldiers have very tangled love lives. Take two particular cases: firstly, a soldier, whose girlfriend became pregnant, turned to me and said, my Mum's a single mum, she made a decent job of bringing me up and I'm going to be there for her. My thought was that he was showing the first part of commitment. I don't know how it ended because he moved on, but there was no question of him not accepting the baby and standing by her. The second concerned a local girl in a steady relationship with a young soldier. He was killed abroad. How long is it for cohabitation to be 'long-term'? A week? A month? A night? Is it having children? Some people cannot have children but live 30, 40 or 50 years together.*[69] This latter example underlines the whole problem of discerning commitment in an informal relationship that can have far-reaching consequences when difficulties arise.

5.2.1.3 Multiple and Short-Term Relationships

Direct experience of multiple relationships from within the congregation survey was limited, but a consensus from the conversations was that if cohabitation is to be tolerated, serial relationships become inevitable, when *it is easier for cohabitees to move to new partners if there are not the same legal or ethical constraints on them.*[70]

Following on from what is perceived to be a reluctance to make a lifelong commitment, one respondent commented: *cohabitation is part of the throwaway society. People aren't willing to work at things any more. It's much easier to discard everything including marriages, partners and even children. Society seems to be*

[68] L252: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[69] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60. There are several military establishments near Harrogate, both British and American.
[70] L008: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/over-60.

becoming less stable, maybe due to more disposable income leading to a pick and choose attitude. There is more opportunity for both partners to be like that.[71] Several respondents experience echoed the findings from the statistics that there is no strong link between cohabitation and marriage failure: a*lthough cohabitation is now part of the culture, it does not follow that cohabitation leads to failing marriages. There are just too many pressures on young people now, different attitudes in society, greater toleration of people having affairs and giving up on your marriage. Nobody expects people to carry on if they are having problems and it seems to be readily expected that young people will just split up.*[72]

A person's ability to form a life-long commitment was questioned, and how they would be able to recommit to a new relationship: *people make vows with the very best of intentions at the time but the church should somehow accommodate people who subsequently take another partner.*[73] *Couples who have been married before . . .may be wary about making that commitment again and prefer to live together.*[74] *A lot of people have been damaged by divorce within their family and do not trust the notion of life-long commitment that has a feel of entrapment. We should support and encourage love-bonds, promoting marriage, but not causing additional pain for victims of divorce.*[75] Lack of intent is not making couples cautious of declaring a lifetime commitment; it is more about whether they can accommodate its consequences.

5.2.1.4 Divorce and Remarriage

As with the clergy, there were concerns over divorce and remarriage that occupied the attention of several respondents. Although not the principal focus of this thesis, I have included some relevant comments.

In terms of expectation: *before my eldest daughter got married, a friend said, 'if it doesn't work out, she can get divorced'. I replied, 'If she's walking up the aisle, she's*

[71] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[72] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[73] L107: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/separated/45-60.
[74] L207: Methodist/NPP/female/married/35-44.
[75] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/35-44.

making promises before God, not preparing for divorce'.[76] The statement that 'It is important to have a relationship that can be dismantled with minimum formality' (**B1(g)**) was challenged by congregations from all denominational groups: the aspiration is still for permanence. The general comment was that divorce is too easily used as a get-out clause when a marriage runs into difficulty, particularly when for many couples, the cost involved is no longer a barrier to instigating proceedings. Several correspondents criticised the way in which couples approach marriage: *the high divorce rate suggests that the wording of the marriage vows 'until death us do part' has an unwritten codicil 'unless it becomes inconvenient'. Lip service is paid to the promises entered into with little emphasis on the truth. Marriage has to be a joint effort and has to be the product of hard work, compromise, and above all, love.*[77]

There are particular problems for Roman Catholics, for whom the church will only recognise their first marriage so long as their marriage partner is still living, except in exceptional circumstances where an annulment may be granted. A twice-divorced respondent whose second failed marriage may have been forgiven by the church, but, is so far as the Church is concerned, *still married to the father of my children: I remain a married woman while my first husband is still alive.*[78] This same respondent went on to say that *it's much easier to be a good Catholic if you are female and post menopausal. When marriage was first instigated, nobody lived past 35, but even then, I'm sure there was abuse and cruelty. The Church should be more understanding when congregations live their lives their own way.*[79] Ideally, both partners coming to a relationship will be single: *if both partners are free to marry, I do not agree with cohabitation. But if one partner is divorced, then cohabitation becomes a realistic option.*[80] There seems little doubt that many Roman Catholics who have been divorced have felt shame and distress over their Church's attitude towards failed marriages rather than show forgiveness and compassion: *I kept away from church for about 20 years and during that time I did cohabit, remarried, but then divorced again.*

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[76] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[77] L148: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/over-60.
[78] L145: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/divorced/45-60.
[79] L145: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/divorced/45-60. Within the survey 8/138 or 5.8% of Roman Catholic respondents were divorced, but all still considered themselves to be Catholics. This may be compared with 13/276 or 4.7% for all other respondents.
[80] L128: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/unmarried/45-60.

I'm divorced twice and have two adult children.[81] *Having divorced once, I am now happily married. I strongly believe in marriage. Divorce was the most awful time of my life. I had to leave my first husband but I still loved him. I was ashamed and if people in the congregation had been judging me, the distress would have been unbearable. I left the Roman Catholic Church because I was never allowed to forget my sin.*[82] Technically, Roman Catholics who cohabit are effectively excommunicating themselves: many do cohabit and have to deal with the problem on both an emotional and church level, and may change over time as each person follows their unique life pattern: *I was actually a church-goer, then I started socialising leading to a few serious relationships, falling in love. That's when I wasn't the catholic I am now. I was just finding out about myself and who I am.*[83]

One respondent reflected a more general feeling that *churches should have more concern for those who have been the innocent parties of divorce cases and that those dealing with annulment should have themselves been married and come from a much wider social range.*[84] If there is a consensus, it is that *life is now very different and churches should consider this. We live much longer, have fewer children and women's expectations are much higher. It should be possible to 'start again' though not without conditions.*[85] Divorce rather than just annulment should be accessible to Roman Catholics: grounds for annulment may be very difficult to establish and therefore it is resisted. *Perhaps if more couples cohabited prior to marriage, then the divorce rate wouldn't be so high: if someone ends up in an unhappy or abusive marriage, then the person is in a no-win situation.*[86]

There were also some observations of how children react: *when my oldest boy went to secondary school, he found a lot of his group were from single parents, divorced parents and so on. This clearly unsettled him, and he asked if we, his parents, intended to separate. The situation had made him feel very uncomfortable and uncertain and in need of reassurance. We all know children whose parents are no*

[81] L145: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/divorced/45-60.
[82] L289: Anglican/Liberal/female/remarried/45-60.
[83] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/35-44.
[84] L174: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/over-60.
[85] L141: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/widowed/over-60.
[86] L118: Roman Catholic/Traditional/male/married/35-44.

longer married, who often realise what is going on but don't show it;[87] *my own brother divorced. Their children were grown up (the oldest girl was 21, finishing at University). She couldn't cope. She was a perfectly normal mature adult, but was totally upset by the break-up.*[88]

There was evidence that the trauma of divorce after a failed marriage may cause a women to be more cautious of entering a second marriage, partly because the financial security that could only come through marriage is not needed in the same way: *they know they can stand on their own two feet. You don't even have to have be in a permanent relationship with a man to have a baby these days. That's made a huge difference. I said to my daughter, what would you do if you fall in love again and she replied that she would definitely live together. My daughter sees marriage with children as an ideal but the divorce made her realise the finality of it.*[89] This accords with the view that by cohabiting, one may avoid costly mistakes; *firstly, can you live with this person, secondly, if it falls apart, it saves on divorce.*[90]

There is also a perception within congregations that despite changes in church teaching, many clergy still harbour disapproval over divorce and remarriage.

5.2.2 Cohabitation and Community

There was strong opposition (354/380) to the statement 'Marriage is unnecessary in present day society' (**B1(f)**): *the institution of marriage is a 'mainstay' holding the fabric of a civilised society together, giving security and moral guidelines for future generations. I appreciate that it's not possible for some couples to make this commitment but I would encourage all to find loving relationships that do not hurt others. I feel particularly strongly that those who have been divorced and remarry, finding happiness and love, should not be barred from the sacraments of the church.*[91]

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[87] L277, L301: Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.
[88] L277, L301:Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.
[89] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[90] L206: Methodist/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[91] L108: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/45-60.
A similar comment was made by L369: Anglican/Evangelical/female/divorced/over-60.

Part of marriage and community is the public wedding. This may be daunting to some couples, for others, a casualty of a generation gap: *I've been having a lot of discussion with my daughters following a storyline on TV about a couple getting married and how the wedding has been hijacked by the grandmother to be the wedding she never had. In the end the couple ran off and got married very quietly: they just want to be together, married. It has made my own daughters think a lot about their attitudes.*[92]

The reality for many young couples is that *economic factors often mitigate against marriage in favour of cohabitation, not least the cost of the wedding itself.*[93] *In view of the continual rise in house prices it is inevitable that young people are discouraged in entering marriage since they cannot build a home life. Force of circumstances is often the basis of cohabitation.*[94] More than one respondent suggested the use of tax breaks for married couples may help ease the economic pressures.[95]

There is some criticism of couples contemplating cohabitation: *if people are willing to make a commitment through joint mortgages, children, etc, why not marry? Churches should offer a cheap simple wedding option.*[96] (This will be pursued in Chapter 8 under the heading 'Celebrated Relationship'). Other respondents considered that the church should practice a dual role: *the church should practice tolerance for those whose lifestyles do not accord with its traditional teaching, giving support only to those actively seeking marriage.*[97] However, this does not obviate a growing concern amongst congregations for the rising numbers of people who are cohabiting.[98]

There was disagreement (361/387) with the statement 'Marriage matters **only** if there are children within the relationship' (**B1(e)**): this has already been highlighted in the context of relationship and is consistent with the view that the ideal is for children to be born into a marriage. However, an unexpected view from a Roman Catholic source was that *couples who cohabit often have stronger and longer lasting relationships and*

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[92] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[93] Figures released by Sainsbury's Bank suggest that the average cost of a wedding has risen to almost £16000: loans in excess of £10000 are commonplace, The Times, 22 June 2004.
[94] L319: Methodist/Conservative/male/married//.
A similar comment was voiced by L209: Anglican/Conservative/male/married/45-60.
[95] This was the case when I married in the mid-1960s: so far as I recall, tax breaks were terminated in the early 1980s.
[96] L282: Anglican/Liberal/female/married/over-60.
[97] L140: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/over-60.
[98] L239: Anglican/NPP/female/married/over-60.

make excellent parents.[99] Nevertheless, issues surrounding children and families may highlight some of the weaknesses of cohabitation: *I feel very strongly that children should not be born outside of marriage. It seems to make couples try harder to stay together if they are married.*[100] *If children are involved whether belonging to one or both cohabiting partners, marriage should be encouraged.*[101] *It is not fair on children. If the relationship collapses, there are further problems such as what you call the children: they often go for the man's name, but if it all falls apart, do you want to go back to the mother's name?*[102] There were similar doubts over cohabitation from an Anglican source also: *When children are involved I am unsure of my understanding of the relationship between couples. That makes me question what I know and feel to be right as a Christian.*[103] *Marriage is the ideal way for couples to live and to bring up children and should be given every encouragement. At the same time, education about what marriage involves is vital; too many couples marry badly.*[104]

Respondents from all denominations expressed concern beyond the immediacy of the couple themselves: *there are implications for social policy such as the nurture of children, inheritance, same-sex relationships, and so on. This is more about groups within society than individuals. Lifestyles are so chaotic that society and family life are in disarray.*[105]

A contrary view was expressed: *I know couples who've never married but raised kids and done a great job.* When questioned on what, if anything, the couples and their children are missing through not being married, their response was: *I don't think they've missed out on anything. They are still together, and have all the things they wanted originally. It usually means they have not come from religious backgrounds, so they've grown up thinking for themselves, knowing what's right and wrong for them and just figured it out. My own children are in their early 20s and, don't even think about marriage. Yet there's commitment within couples and families are*

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[99] L080: Roman Catholic/Traditional/male/married/35-44.
[100] L188: Methodist/NPP//cohabited+married/45-60.
[101] L206: Methodist/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[102] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[103] L285: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/widowed/over-60.
[104] L170: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/cohabited+married,25-34.
[105] L338: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/unmarried/45-60; a similar comment was raised by L026: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/over-60.

sprouting as a result. They're still related to someone by virtue of being someone's son or daughter. People got married originally to unite land and wealth: my son and daughter have only themselves to bring into a relationship.[106] This latter point is possibly one of the most important statements to be made in the context of forming relationships, that personal qualities determine the integrity of the union.[107]

5.2.3 Cohabitation and Church Life

One would expect to find a greater awareness of cohabitation within congregations where there is not the same sense of isolation felt by some clergy. However, this invites tensions between the attitude of the congregation as a whole and a member's own views, for example: *I may accept them but do not approve of what they are doing.*[108] Others found it difficult to come to terms with cohabitation: *I think I should accept their decision, even though I disagree with it but I don't always achieve this.*[109] Some considered that a person's marital status is part of their private life, provided they act with integrity: *Christian people all have something to contribute to the church family regardless of their marital status as long as they live an ethical life.*[110] There are also the social implications for a congregation reflecting on cohabitation as a lifestyle that cannot be ignored. This, in general, does lead to a certain tolerance: *the church should be tolerant of the situation and not discriminating, but eventually the vicar may ask a couple if they are thinking of getting married. It seems strange for a church attendee to cohabit and stay unmarried.*[111]

I believe strongly that marriage is God's preferred way for couples to live but cohabitation should ***never*** *be used as an excuse to prevent people participating fully in all aspects of church life.*[112] In spite of this general acceptance of cohabiting couples into a congregation, some respondents expressed reservations, particularly amongst Roman Catholics: *the Catholic faith is for everyone. I believe a person*

[106] L145: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/divorced,45-60.
[107] See discussion on Giddens and the concept of a pure family (Chapter 3).
[108] L130: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/married/over-60.
[109] L109: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/25-34.
[110] L277: Anglican/Liberal/female/married/35-45.
[111] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[112] L321: Methodist/ Liberal/ female/ married/45-60.

cohabiting is committing a sin, but we are commanded not to cast the first stone.[113] However, within the church family, there is concern that cohabitation *should not be seen by others as lowering standards, causing rifts in families or in the church fellowship.*[114]

A majority view (347/406), spread over all denominational groups, was that, in response to 'Do you personally accept couples who come to church but are living together as though married?' (**C1(a)**), cohabiting couples should be welcomed into a congregation.

Attitudes softened when asked 'Are you more inclined to accept older couples cohabiting where this is mainly for companionship?' (**C1(b)**). Significant numbers of liberals agreed (20/60) but there was no concession to age from evangelicals and liberal-evangelicals, only (8/104) supporting the proposition.

Whatever one's personal views, there is an overwhelming feeling that no person is in a position to judge the behaviour of another couple and their chosen lifestyle and whether or not they intend to marry. The attitude is more often one of acceptance rather than judgement: *from personal experience, I've found it is more important to keep lines of love and communication open and not express judgement of a couple.*[115] *The most important thing we can show to couples, married or cohabiting, is love, not judgement or prejudice.*[116] *A friendly acceptance of the couple is more likely to make then feel at home in the church and to think about the importance and commitment of marriage.*[117]

Individuals within congregations may feel the need to lead by example: *I am grateful that I was welcomed into church despite my lifestyle! Before becoming a Christian I did not believe in marriage – my attitude has changed as a result of coming to faith.*[118] Congregation members found problems when couples cohabit with no intention to marry: *I accept other people's choices, and I don't consider them any less*

[113] L118: Roman Catholic/Traditional/male/unmarried/35-44.
[114] L025: Methodist/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[115] L025: Methodist/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[116] L274: Anglican/Liberal/female/cohabited+married+divorced/over-60.
[117] L324: Methodist/NPP/female/married/over-60.
[118] L296: Anglican/Evangelical/female/unmarried(single parent)/35-44.

worthy because they are not married and welcome them. I still believe the ideal is marriage. In a church context, I would hope that teaching from the front would encourage them to think about marriage.[119]

In large congregations, in line with the clergy comments, there may be much less awareness of a particular couple's status, unless they choose to make it known. The problem then is seen to be: *are they setting the wrong example, what position do they occupy inside or outside the church?*[120] The reality is that *you would probably get to know the couple before finding out they were not married; you couldn't then ignore their status.*[121]

A slightly smaller proportion (254/379) responded positively to 'A person's chosen lifestyle to be none of my business' (**C1(c)**): *As a divorcee of long standing (after 17 yrs of marriage) I do not feel we can condemn people who cohabit. There may be many reasons we do not know that they cannot change. God will be our judge, not us.*[122] The (70/379) who thought it was a concern for the congregation were spread over all denominations, traditions marital status, gender and age ranges. Some felt vulnerable or that the integrity of the congregation could be threatened where couples were openly cohabiting. There were some strong feelings that cohabitation should not be presented as a norm in the same sense with which they regard marriage commenting: *it is their own concern and a question for their conscience, but if they cohabit, it is wrong, even if they cannot see it themselves.*[123] *We accept these people but cannot condone their lifestyle.*[124] Although congregations may be tolerant of cohabitation, there is caution: *I respect their right to choose, but I would be concerned if the couple openly advocated living together outside marriage.*[125]

There was sympathy for couples whose personal circumstances mitigate against marriage: there may be problems from previous marriages, such as a need for more

[119] L277: Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60. A similar comment was made by L301: Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.
[120] L128, Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/unmarried/over-60.
[121] L034: ONC/NPP/female/married/45-60.
[122] L223: Methodist/Conservative/female/divorced/over-60.
[123] L117: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/divorced/over-60.
[124] L370: Anglican/Evangelical//married//.
[125] L324: Methodist/NPP/female/married/over-60:; a similar comment was made by L209 Anglican/Methodist/Conservative/male/married/45-60.

time to recover from abusive or violent relationships, but *if the couple are very much in love, then they were more likely to be fully accepted into a congregation.*[126] Several respondents highlighted circumstances such as widows losing pension rights as a reason for not marrying or remarrying (whether from direct experience or anecdotal knowledge is not certain).[127] The situation of one partner being a carer for the other was also raised, as an example of where two people cohabit for companionship in a non-sexual but loving relationship.[128]

5.2.3.1 Children and Baptism

There were clear tensions between cohabitation and marriage over the issue of children, and how far toleration extends to approval: *there's maybe a word in between needed. People are looking more at whether their offspring are happy, what are they doing in their life, is it bringing them some kind of joy?*[129]

Respondents found added complications when cohabitation involves families. Several respondents held views on the effect of cohabitation on children, such as: *what I'm not so keen on is when people cohabit for long periods of time and have children. I feel that's a sad situation: if you have children, you definitely should be married.*[130] If a couple goes on to marry, *who does one invite, the biological father or the man who brought me up? In my case, the man who was really a father to me is still only my mother's partner. You can see where situations become more and more complicated and people want to simplify things.*[131]

The subject of children and baptism was raised with several respondents at interview, rather than in the questionnaire itself. The comments reiterated the love and support extended to the children, without necessarily having to approve the lifestyle of their parents. *I think it is important to have a sexual relationship only in a relationship that*

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[126] L044: Anglican/ONC/NPP/cohabited+married/male/over-60.
[127] L348: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/unmarried/over-60.
L360: Roman Catholic/ Traditional/female/married/25-34.
L282: ONC/Liberal/female/married/45-60 (but worships in an Anglican congregation).
L040: ONC/Liberal/female/married/over-60.
[128] L285: Anglican,Liberal-Evangelical/female/widowed/over-60.
[129] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern-Liberal/female/married/35-44.
[130] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[131] L039: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60

is prepared to have children, as this is always a possible outcome i.e. with love and commitment.[132] Looking beyond the immediacy of the baptism itself, there was a sense that the church should focus more on providing a sense of community. *When we had children, my husband was agnostic, but I felt there was a sense of community in the church and that if I died, there would be a group out there who would look out for them.*[133] The concept of the extended family was made more specific with respect to the role of godparents: *children should be baptised. My Godmother was a tremendous influence on me.*[134] *Godparents influence their godchildren's choices and in particular future life choices regarding marriage, morality, and so on.*[135]

Within the church family, there is an expectation that *couples living together will eventually get married. If they have children, it would be a little bit awkward, because people may assume they are married. But it doesn't make any difference to having the child baptised, whether the parents are married or not.*[136] *It is what they lose by not being within a stable, committed marriage. You have to be careful because there are marriages that are far from ideal and children may be better brought up outside marriage. The issue is if the children have the security of a mother and father who are both committed, then cohabitation may actually be a good second best.*[137] *Marriage gives children stability. It doesn't always work out but that should be the ideal, not a father who appears and disappears again, followed by a whole succession of other people who have no intention of staying around. It is very, very difficult to establish relationships when the biological father is not there: it is a very brave person who takes on somebody else's children.*[138]

5.2.3.2 Cohabitation and Church Office

Congregations overall were almost evenly split over 'Whether a person known to be cohabiting could be elected to office' (**C3**), with (169/397) for and (184/397) against. One respondent spotted a distinction that *a person could (be elected to office) but we*

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[132] L131: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/35-44.
[133] L084: Roman Catholic,Modern/female/married/35-44.
[134] L272: Anglican,Conservative/female/widowed/over-60.
[135] L167: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/widowed/35-44.
[136] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[137] L277: Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.
A similar comment was made by L301: Anglican/Evangelical/married/female/45-60.
[138] L282; ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.

don't think they should.[139] Across the denominational groups, Methodists showed the greatest tolerance, (68/113) and within the traditions, liberals showed greatest tolerance (57/88). The detractors are summed up by the comment: *it doesn't set a very good example for the rest of the congregation, if you are cohabiting.*[140]

The term 'church office' takes on different meanings across the denominations. As a generality, leadership may include *spiritual leadership or some positions of responsibility.*[141] In general, readiness to accept a person known to be cohabiting into leadership roles *depends on the person having a good sound character.*[142] There was concern that cohabitation should *not be on a long-term basis.*[143] Some of the more generous responses were that *all God's talents are to be used for His church regardless of marriage or cohabitation.*[144] *Election to such as a side-person that does not involve leadership may encourage that person to be more involved in the church.*[145] Anyone elected or appointed would be subject to careful scrutiny, such that *their views did not undermine any other person in the church and the attitudes of those making the decision.*[146] The nature of their relationship and the way the person interacted with the church was a prime concern: *the length, stability, quality of life and love in their family and church relationship.*[147] In the context of the role model shown to young Christians, the situation could be more acceptable *if they have a near commitment to marriage.*[148]

When asked specifically 'Could a person who is cohabiting be acceptable as a Sunday School teacher?' (**C4**), opinions differed across all the variables tested, reflecting doubts about the message it gave to young people in the infant and junior age groups: (150/402) found it acceptable, (206/402) answered 'no', with only (46/402) saying 'sometimes'. The reality is that it is *equally likely that their teacher at school is*

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[139] L398: ONC/Evangelical/female/married/over-60;
A similar comment was made by L411: ONC/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[140] L008: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[141] L035: Methodist/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
A similar comment was made by L373: Anglican/Evangelical/male/married/35-44.
[142] L110: Roman Catholic/Traditional//unmarried/over-60.
[143] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[144] L249: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[145] L373: Anglican/Evangelical/male/married/35-44.
[146] L237: Anglican/Liberal/male/married/over-60.
[147] L026: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/over-60.
[148] L292: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.

cohabiting and the fact their Sunday School teacher is doing likewise would not seem unusual to young people.[149] Even though there could be problems as to how a Sunday School teacher would explain Church teaching on marriage, it is their personal qualities and integrity that matter. Good teachers should not be ruled out: *God-given skills do not diminish with cohabitation and children need good teachers, regardless of their marital status.*[150] Their reason for cohabiting and whether they are in a long-term strongly committed relationship alongside their commitment to God are regarded as the important issues. One view expressed was that attitudes to cohabitation should lead to discrimination: *Although I would prefer them not to cohabit before marriage, it is entirely up to the individual. I drink alcohol but would hate to be turned down as a Sunday School teacher.*[151] It is clear that cohabitation does not always sit easily with leadership issues if the church is perceived to be falling short of its own standards.

The numbers who would consider leaving a congregation over cohabitation as an issue, whether or not the couple has declared an intention to marry, are very small, 2/408 (**C2(a)**) and 6/405 (**C2(b)**) respectively. The comment was made: *if you do, your faith is not that strong.*[152] These figures may become more significant if *the couple were in a position of authority. We would remain in the church but not condone their lifestyle.*[153]

In reply to the question 'If a couple in the congregation are cohabiting with no intention to marry, should the church encourage them towards marriage?' (**C5**), (297/406) were in favour. There was some variation between the denominational groups, ranging from 68% of Roman Catholics to 84% of ONC, no doubt influenced by the view that *there should be clear Biblical teaching from the front on Christian marriage and the way 'singles' and 'marrieds' should be living.*[154] This is a very sensitive area. There was a strong feeling from all denominational groups that provided the couple were free to marry, encouragement should be through example and not pressured, but *should be done privately, between a priest and the couple,*

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[149] L307: Methodist/Liberal/female/unmarried/35-34.
[150] L259: Anglican/Liberal/male/married/45-60.
[151] L306: Methodist/Liberal/female/unmarried/25-34.
[152] L153: Roman Catholic/Traditional/male/separated/over-60.
[153] L370: Anglican/Evangelical//married//.
A similar comment was made by L246: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/25-34.
[154] L277: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/45-60; 301: Anglican/Evangelical/male/married/45-60.

through guidance and without judgement.[155] The approach should be one of *exploring and educating the person's belief system and values.*[156] There was, at the same time, the awareness expressed that *if a person has had a previous 'bad' marriage ending in separation or divorce, it is often hard for that individual to retake vows with a new partner.*[157]

There was a much smaller sample (41/414) of respondents who admitted to having cohabited at some time in the past either on a long-term basis or prior to marriage, hence there is much less to report under (**C6**). Of the few who did reply positively, several commented they cohabited before they became Christian or part of a worshipping community.[158]

For more than half of this group (26/41), their cohabiting status at the time was not known to the congregation (**C6(a)**): this does not necessarily indicate concealment, only that it may not have seemed relevant. The proportions vary across the denominations, the highest proportions being Anglicans and Methodists, mainly liberals, and modern Catholics. Most couples felt they were supported by their clergy (**C6(b)**) (less so by Catholics) and that they were able then to conduct their relationship openly without recrimination from the congregation (**C6(c)**).

The issue of cohabitation is sufficiently sensitive that a significant number of cohabitees (albeit, a very small sample) would have considered moving to another congregation if they had been subject to disapproval (**C6(d)**). There was an instance reported where a couple was requested to move to another congregation (not necessarily to another denomination) *on the advice of the clergy.* Others were not so accommodating and would *not have tolerated disapproval that would be seen as bigotry.*[159] Another respondent strongly condemned of a lack of tolerance found in their own church at the time: *I didn't dare go which was a shame and something I regret. I would not like other people to judge and would not myself judge a cohabiting*

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[155] L136: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/cohabited+married/35-44.
A similar comment was made by L243: Anglican/Liberal/female/cohabited+remarried/25-34.
[156] L042: ONC/Evangelical/male/cohabited+married/35-44.
[157] L204: Methodist/NPP/female/widowed/45-60.
[158] Compare this with the Le Tissier survey, Chapter 1 n. 36).
[159] L084: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/35-44.

couple. I'd rather they came to church. I went on my own occasionally and over the years, regained my strong faith.[160]

A majority found they were accepted as a couple rather than two single people, (though mostly outside the Roman Catholic congregations) (**C6(e)**). An evangelical view was that *it is important to uphold the values and institution of marriage. I could be loving towards cohabiting couples without condoning the act of cohabitation.*[161] A general indictment on the perceived attitude of many congregations from a non-conformist is typified by the view that *I feel that couples living together may not have the courage to go to church because they feel they will be judged and condemned and perhaps.*[162]

5.2.4 Church Teaching and Relationship Education

A majority from all denominations (272/381) agreed that 'Cohabitation undermines the church's teaching on marriage' (**B1(j)**), or at least reduces its influence. There were reservations: *when only 10% of the population attends church regularly one must question whether this undermining of the church's teaching is as important as many other issues.*[163]

A clear majority (272/399) from all persuasions answered 'sometimes' to the question 'Is the church's teaching on marriage out of date?' (**D1**). For the church as a whole, the dilemma was summed up by the comment: *the clergy are in a very difficult situation; they have their church teaching but how do they bridge the gap with contemporary attitudes. Even if the couple aren't living together, they may still be sleeping together. It's almost the same thing. I don't think the clergy could control it. They are condemned if they do and condemned if they don't.*[164] This led to the response that *marriage teaching isn't out of date but the way it is proclaimed needs to*

[160] L289: Anglican/Liberal/female/cohabited+remarried/45-60.
[161] L287: Anglican/Evangelical/male/married/45-60.
[162] L008: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[163] L257: Anglican/Liberal/female/divorced/45-60.
[164] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.

be more respectful of the society in which the church exists.[165] *There needs to be a clear message about the benefits of marriage especially for children.*[166]

Some liberals (22/88) and modern Catholics (23/73), took a view that the church's teaching on marriage needed to be strengthened: e*ven though I have been married for 29 years I feel I could learn a lot about the Church's teaching on marriage! I have a daughter and may need to guide her in the future.*[167] Several respondents felt that the church as a whole should be doing more to tell people both in and outside the church what Christian marriage is all about: *It should stress the need for loyalty, constancy, and fidelity as well as promoting the sense of responsibility for the possible results of a relationship such as children.*[168] *We need to accept that many stable, loving relationships can occur outside of marriage and the fact that a couple are cohabiting doesn't make them any less Christian. If someone is a good Christian, it should not matter whatever their status.*[169]

The criticism that clergy are not offering sufficiently strong leadership comes partly because of the tension between cultural practice and church teaching. There is concern that this should not be *a lowering of Christian standards.*[170] *Increasingly the church has to have a policy, and if it doesn't take a stand, somebody else will step in to fill the vacuum.*[171] Commitment and relationship are seen to be important: *if the church were to modernise its views on marriage, I feel it would just be lowering one's expectations of marriage further. At least there is a standard to aspire to, even if it doesn't always work out.*[172] *Cohabitation is part of a diminution and change of standards, which can only be countered with patient but persistent guidance towards a more meaningful way of life.*[173] *I would expect the clergy to take a strong line against cohabitation. If they didn't, then I might go to another church.*[174] Others

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[165] L338: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/45-60.
[166] L273: Anglican/Liberal/male/married/45-60.
[167] L151: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/45-60.
[168] L136, Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/45-60.
[169] L170: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/cohabiting/25-34.
[170] L025: Methodist/Liberal/married/male/over-60; a similar comment was made by L322: Methodist/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[171] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[172] L029: Methodist/Liberal/female/unmarried/18-24.
[173] L221: Methodist/NPP/male/divorced/over-60.
[174] L128: Roman Catholic,Traditional/female/unmarried/over-60.

criticised the church leadership in that *if a cohabiting couple were Christians, I feel a rebuke would be in order.*[175]

There was a majority view (225/384) that 'Cohabitation by Christians weakens the church's authority in society' (**D2(a)**). This is saying that cohabitation within the worshipping community is a threat to the integrity of the church's teaching. *If the church's teaching is correct, then it is right for all time.*[176] *How far should the church follow social convention? Although I do not believe cohabitation to be sinful, especially prior to marriage, it cannot be right for the church to change its teaching because of public opinion. The church must lead, not be led.*[177] The long established tradition on marriage is seen as a standard to be maintained: *I cannot understand how the church can be expected to change its views on marriage that have been there for two thousand years. Present day problems only reinforce the validity of the church's traditional teaching on the sacrament of marriage.*[178]

A substantial number (301/383) from all persuasions agreed that 'The church should expand its teaching on marriage' (**D2(b)**); *the church should be more pro-active.*[179] *Many young (and older) people probably have no idea what the church views on marriage are.*[180] However, there is a note of caution: *it very important that truth should not be watered down. The emphasis should be the Lordship of Christ in our lives and clear biblical teaching.*[181]

The statement 'The church should find ways to encourage cohabiting couples towards marriage' (**D2(c)**) attracts considerable support with (321/399) in favour. This is reflected across all denominations and traditions and prompted the comment: *the church needs to differentiate more between the civil and religious sides of the ceremony. The church however should not water down its Biblical teaching to appeal to the secular society.*[182] The emphasis is on encouragement, not coercion: *I don't*

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[175] L045: ONC/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[176] L106: Roman Catholic,Traditional/female/married/over-60.
[177] L288: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/45-60.
A similar comment was made by L098: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/over-60.
[178] L158: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/married/over-60.
[179] L181: Methodist/NPP/female/married/over-60.
[180] L214: Methodist/Conservative/female/married/over-60.
[181] L322: Methodist/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[182] L301: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/45-60.

think the church should try to persuade couples to marry. The decision is a personal one. Marriage should be treasured and married couples supported but the decision to cohabit should not be seen as inferior or something to be frowned upon.[183] *It is important that the church takes a clear stand on what is right and wrong. We must also maintain an attitude of love and acceptance towards people.*[184] *I believe the church should still encourage couples to get married, but it should be open and respect people's choice without being judgemental.*[185] *Whilst we should be encouraging cohabiting couples to marry, Christ died to show His love for all, whatever their way of life.*[186] One route would be through education: *marriage should be promoted more through Catholic Schools with the emphasis on compassion and understanding teaching that long-term marriage is possible and 'a good thing'* probably applies to all schools.[187] A practical suggestion was that *education on marriage as opposed to cohabitation should be introduced into the 'citizenship' syllabus dealing with long-term responsibilities and obligations towards children. This would be mainly for secondary school age but at a simpler level, could be introduced into primary school, along with personal commitment towards all aspects of human life (church, clubs, education, society, councils in general).*[188] There was particular concern for young people in the 16 to 18 year old group.[189]

In the context of church marriage, there was resistance to churches being used as a traditional setting for a wedding without due regard to the religious significance of the event: *I think in some ways it should be harder to get married (in church). Perhaps it should be harder to get divorced.*[190]

5.2.4.1 Marriage Preparation

Congregation respondents took a more positive approach to marriage preparation than some clergy who tended to assume that many aspects of married life don't need to be

[183] L356: Roman Catholic/Liberal/female/cohabited+married/35-44.
[184] L016: ONC/Evangelical/male/married/45-60.
[185] L150: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/married/35-44.
[186] L176: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[187] L112: Roman Catholic/Liberal/male/married/45-60; a similar comment was made by L141: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/widowed/over-60.
[188] L039: ONC/Liberal/female/married/over-60.
[189] L021: Methodist//Single Parent/Divorced/45-60.
[190] L059: ONC/Liberal/ female/married/ 45-60.

discussed with couples already living together. *You should have some sort of session where you talk to each other, as a couple, about what you want in the future, and how you see your future developing as a couple. Some people don't even talk about whether they want children, and if you've never discussed things like that before you get married, it's not going to get any easier afterwards. There are various areas of conflict, how you approach spending and appreciation of money, how much would you be saving. If you have a counsellor and have to go to counselling sessions, I think these matters would arise and get sorted out before you get married.*[191]

5.2.4.1.1 Resources for Marriage Preparation

There were some mixed responses on the subject of marriage preparation. There was majority support (322/389) for the proposition that 'Each church should provide its own structured marriage preparation course' (**D3(a)**). In addition, the statement 'There should be cooperation between groups of churches' (**D3(b)**) also brought support (295/385). Some churches declared they had well structured marriage preparation courses already in place, using material such as FOCCUS. More than one respondent has commented that couples frequently enter marriage on the basis of their current relationship, not having discussed issues such as children and family, and prompted one respondent to make her own list of the aspects of marriage that concerned her and needed to be addressed.[192] Smaller churches have a problem if there are few weddings: clergy often cannot justify developing elaborate marriage preparation programmes, though all would interview the applicants and endeavour to discuss the issues involved.[193] There was a suggestion that marriage preparation should include parenting, in effect, looking beyond the immediacy of the wedding itself: *have marriage education with people available for help before and after marriage.*[194]

For married couples, there was support (268/383) for 'The introduction of services of rededication of marriage vows' (**D3(c)**): this would be done either on a regular, possibly annual basis or as requested. A number of respondents commented that these

[191] L281:Anglican/NPP/ female/married/ 45-60.
[192] L277: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/45-60.
[193] See Chapter 4.
[194] L111: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/widowed/over-60.

were already available in some churches. The level of caution or uncertainty probably reflects unfamiliarity with the idea or what it might be designed to achieve.

There was support (276/385) for better promotion of National Marriage Week (**D3(f)**), though many respondents were unsure of its significance since it hardly features in most church calendars. When explained, it was seen as an appropriate opportunity for the church to make known its teaching on marriage: *we should have more teaching from the pulpit regarding marriage and what the word of God says. The church has become very weak on morality and should speak out more.*[195] Cohabitation is perceived as a moral issue: *if the church doesn't take a moral stand, who will?*[196] *I think it should be preaching more but I think it should also be pressurising government to support family values. If we value 'coupledom', we should value permanent couples, whether the full married life or other relationships. Perhaps we could encourage a return to marriage tax allowances to say we value marriage, extend it to say we value people being in stable relationships.*[197] *I feel that society is in a mess partly due to the high rate of divorce encouraging cohabitation. It can have terrible effects on children. We should try to alter the situation in favour of marriage giving advice etc plus government to try tax breaks etc for married people.*[198] There was also favour (228/372) across all denominational groups 'To expand marriage preparation through outside agencies such as RELATE' (**D3(e)**). The potential for using this route will be discussed in Chapter 8.

About half (189/376) supported the idea that 'Churches should promote Christian marriage at 'Wedding Fairs' and other secular events' (**D3(g)**). However, many were unfamiliar with such events and reluctant to comment.[199]

5.2.4.1.2 Marriage Preparation and Lifestyle

Any attempt to modify the church's position to accommodate different lifestyles brought the response: *the church should not consider changing its teaching to fit in*

[195] L045: ONC/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.
[196] L172: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/married/45-60.
[197] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[198] L273: Anglican/Liberal/male/married/45-60;
A similar comment was made by L263: Anglican/Conservative/female/married/over-60.
[199] Examples where this is already happening will be given in Chapter 8.

with modern society. An institution that is weak and uncertain in its beliefs will eventually lose its followers and its position of authority. Society today is already weakened due to its lack of community, family and faith and all churches should be trying to re-establish these.[200] Rather than diminish the churches role in marriage preparation, there was a call for the church to widen its scope to include cohabitation and foster stability in all relationships. This is partially addressed by (**D3(e)**), as described above, but congregations were overwhelmingly concerned (335/385) that 'Churches should attempt to reach out to non church-going couples through an expansion of marriage preparation', (**D3(d)**:). *When people want to get married, no matter whether they want a civil ceremony or a church wedding, there should be some sort of marriage counselling as part of getting the licence. If you want to marry in church, this should be from the vicar or his appointee. The same applies to civil marriage, counselling from somebody that the Registrar would appoint.*[201] *I feel it ought to be made legal and that you have this preparation. A lot of people wouldn't bother unless it was law. The sort of people perhaps you are talking to in these counselling classes are those who would marry anyway, but a lot of them won't have necessarily thought deeply about issues involved.*[202]

5.2.4.2 Pastoral Care and Marriage Outreach

Exploring some of the weaknesses in the church's teaching on marriage produced a wealth of comments, mostly from Roman Catholic respondents who clearly feel that the church should be much more open to alternative lifestyles, but should not differentiate between those who have a commitment to marry and those who do not (**D2(d), D2(e)**). *Marriage should still be recognised as an important sacrament but those who chose not to take that path should be free to do so without discrimination.*[203] *We need to develop a non-judgemental stance towards other people (including same sex couples), helping them to develop loving, long lasting relationships.*[204] *The church's traditional stance on marriage was formulated as a kind of social control. Now that the church is not an influential voice in society, it seems absurd that we still seek to alienate a huge proportion of the population who*

[200] L343: Roman Catholic/Traditional/female/cohabited+married/35-44.
[201] L281:Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[202] L281:Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[203] L356: Roman Catholic/Liberal/female/married/35-44.
[204] L059: ONC/Liberal/female/married/45-60.

choose to cohabit.[205] *The church does not have any right to lay down laws about how people live. You learn through life that a human being is one's own best counsellor. I believe the Catholic Church wants to be all-powerful and all-controlling and that cannot be right.*[206]

In terms of mission, the response demonstrates concern that the church should be reaching out to non-church-going couples through their marriage preparation courses. However, 'pushing marriage' will put people off having anything to do with the church. The emphasis is on welcoming people, whatever their marital status: *they may be encouraged to marry if they see happily married Christians around them.*[207] *I think people's situations are sometimes difficult and a pastoral approach needs to be taken. More mature lay people should be allowed to be involved in marriage relationship preparation.*[208]

There is a consensus that one of the problems for the church has arisen through its inability to deal properly with the failure of relationships, marriage certainly and even relationships outside of marriage. *Churches get themselves into difficulties on this issue because they have trouble with their teaching on divorce. If they can come to accept that relationships fail, they may be more ready to allow people to remarry. Many couples are prevented from doing so in church and as a result, cohabit from necessity. The alternative would be to give up the chance of happiness they might feel they deserve.*[209]

Pastoral concerns fall into two main areas: firstly there is the pastoral care needed when a marriage has failed, secondly, help to come to terms with the subsequent trauma and feelings of guilt: *if you are a Christian person, you make your vows in church, in full view of the Lord. That's what my daughter struggled with. She couldn't get her head round the divorce. It was she who left the marriage and was ridden with guilt, relieved it was all over but couldn't find a resolution.*[210]

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[205] L307: Methodist/Liberal/female/unmarried/25-34.
[206] L145: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/divorced/45-60.
[207] L059: ONC/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[208] L341: Roman Catholic/Modern/female/remarried,45-60.
[209] L136: Roman Catholic/Modern/male/cohabited+married/45-60.
[210] L186: Methodist/Liberal/female/married/45-60.

There is a growing concern that there is now a divorce culture that allows for an easy exit from a marriage where previous generations had to find ways of working through their difficulties. Attitudes such as *if it doesn't work, you can always get divorced* are now influencing church marriages, in spite of the vows being taken. There is a need for some sort of post marriage counselling from within the church, although few respondents were able to be specific: *if you interviewed couples getting married, they would say it's forever. Most couples feel that way, but need a lot more support than society gives them. Once you're married, you are just expected to get on with it.*[211]

Respondents saw a clear pastoral role for the church: *cohabitation is so widespread outside religious circles, churches must be prepared to welcome cohabiting couples in without a judgmental attitude. However, it should still stand by its beliefs so that cohabitees feel loved and welcome but understand that the church believes marriage is a better way.*[212] This is saying the church should be inclusive, *God's all inclusive love and compassion might lead us to develop more ways of supporting and helping people to grow, nurture and develop relationships, but not to place artificial demands on people which are too far from where they are. I think we have a huge amount to learn.*[213] *If people living together are barred from church, they may never hear God's message.*[214] This in itself creates a tension as to how inclusive should our churches should be.

5.2.5 Alternative Liturgies

This is an area where congregations felt least qualified to respond, apart from some comments on civil marriage plus a church blessing as an alternative to church wedding, or where marriage in church would offend canon law.

[211] L145: Modern Catholic/female/divorced/45-60.
[212] L373: Anglican/Evangelical/male/married/35-45.
[213] L026: Methodist-Anglican/Liberal/female/married/over-60.
[214] L005: ONC/Evangelical/female/married/over-60.

5.2.5.1 Civil Marriage Plus Church Blessing

As a generalisation, churchgoers do tend to draw a distinction between civil and church marriage, focussing on the upholding of the marriage vows made before God. This precipitates a degree of caution over allowing remarriage in church involving the remaking of vows, set against the acknowledgement that there needs to be more compassion and forgiveness for a couple whose marriage has disintegrated. There is a view that civil marriage is no more than the legalisation of the relationship and that the taking of vows in church raises marriage to a higher level. *Before I came to the faith, I regarded marriage as 'just a bit of paper', but now realise it has a much deeper meaning.*[215]

Within all denominations, there are those for whom the preferred route to remarriage is through a civil ceremony followed by a church blessing in a service *that can acknowledge the need to move forward in a new relationship.*[216] *Some of my friends are reforming relationships; they'll find it very hard because they did their best for their marriage. I do find it very difficult to know at which stage the church should draw a line;*[217] *When my friends remarried in church, I wasn't very comfortable about it. They are making the vows they said before somebody else and I find that very hard to cope with. Because the vows you take in church are so very definite, for life, it is very hard to accept that you've already made those to somebody else.*[218] *We have to tolerate to some extent the development of society, you would completely cut yourself off if you didn't, but if you are divorced, you should be able to remarry in a civil ceremony.*[219]

A supplementary consideration is the difference between religious and civil ceremonies and whether getting married in church makes any difference: *I watched an interview with Jim Davidson, the comedian. He's been married numerous times, but said the wedding that meant most to him was when he was married by a minister. That, I thought, was interesting. For a lot of people, a church connection makes for a*

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[215] L296: Anglican/Evangelical/female/unmarried/35-44.
[216] L282: ONC/Liberal/female/married/45-60.
[217] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[218] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.
[219] L281: Anglican/NPP/married/female/45-60.

proper wedding in a way that a Register Office marriage doesn't.[220] *Marriage is one of the most important events in a person's life. Where better for Christians to take the vows of marriage than in their church? The church should encourage both the Christian teaching of the sanctity of marriage and the taking of those vows, not only within its members but those outside the church also. This is part of evangelism;*[221] *all the family saw the marriage as a positive moving on of their relationship.*[222]

5.2.5.2 Betrothal

The issue of betrothal and its potential reintroduction was not addressed in the congregation questionnaire, since I felt it was outside the experience of ordinary church-goers. This was confirmed in the interviews: the concept was met with confusion and a general lack of understanding of what it could achieve. I have been unable to formulate specific comments, but general reaction was the association of betrothal with dowry and families and not how it would interact with present day engagement .

Congregations were asked to give their views on whether or not a partnership-type agreement should be offered to cohabiting couples (**B1(h)**). A range of views was found across all denominations: the greater measure of disagreement is found amongst the Roman Catholics and Other Non-Conformist, mainly evangelical churches, who are most opposed to cohabitation. However, there were no additional comments made.

5.2.5.3 Baptism

There were very few constructive comments relating to baptism as a liturgical matter, except that there was a general feeling amongst Baptists that the issue as presented in the questionnaire was directed too much towards child baptism.

[220] L282: ONC/Liberal/married/female/45-60.
[221] L011: Methodist/Evangelical/male/married//.
[222] L252: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical/female/married/over-60.

5.3 Concluding Remarks – Chapters 4 and 5

Clergy and congregations in Harrogate are very much aware of cohabitation making an impact on their churches and on contemporary society. There is a need to defend marriage when society is becoming increasingly tolerant of cohabitation that is being driven by secular forces. The general reaction within churches is that a cohabiting couple should be encouraged towards marriage through direct preaching as well as by example. There is clearly some unease and great uncertainty over the impact of cohabitation on the church, but an unwillingness to condemn outright something neither clergy nor congregations fully understand. Put simply, a non-conformist from the evangelical tradition made the comment: *if it wasn't for the fact people wanted sex with each other before getting married, the issue wouldn't be perhaps as strong as it has become.*[223] There is considerable sympathy for couples who genuinely, for whatever reason (frequently economic), find it difficult or impossible to contemplate marriage in their particular circumstances. The reality is that cohabitation and marriage may be outwardly indistinguishable, and both have their advantages and drawbacks. This was recognised by a senior churchman who has moved to the Midlands, whose view was that *marriage can be a great blessing, but often isn't. Cohabitation, also, can be a great blessing, and often isn't. I have a daughter who has cohabited for many years and has two children. They are a good family that, call it what you will, is marriage in all but name.*[224]

There is a call for better marriage education at all levels, extending beyond the traditional role of marriage preparation, reaching out to all couples in or contemplating long-term relationships. Existing programmes of marriage preparation are variable in their approach and content. There is a particular problem in that most clergy show little appreciation of the potential impact of previous marriage-like relationships and whether they have been satisfactorily resolved.

Both clergy and congregations are conscious that some couples settle for cohabitation because they find marriage presents a psychological barrier. This points towards a need for a simplified or less formal marriage service, as well as finding ways of

[223] C024: Methodist/Liberal-Evangelical.
[224] Letter to author, 01 September 2004.

extending marriage preparation and relationship education to the ever increasing numbers of couples marrying or cohabiting outside the church. These ideas will be addressed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 6

Cohabitation in a Sociological Context

It is clear from the introductory remarks and responses to the survey, that cohabitation mirrors marriage in many ways. In this country, there is a strong tradition of marriage, fostered and supported by the Christian church. From a religious perspective, marriage, as one of several relationships, is primarily a concern of God that is founded and conducted according to godly norms. However, because of our long social and religious history and centuries of debate, these norms have been reinterpreted differently by the various religious denominations, though all take their primary inspiration from the teaching of Jesus, discussed in Chapter 3.

A relatively recent development has been the introduction of civil marriage: whether celebrated in a civil or religious setting, the marriage so created is equally valid in a legal sense. However, there remains a feeling amongst many people, even those who would not normally regard themselves as 'religious', that a church marriage is of a higher order than a civil marriage by virtue of being brought before God. This was certainly the attitude of many clergy who did not want to see marriage split into a legal procedure (essential) and religious service of blessing (optional), echoed in the views of congregations.

Cohabitation may be entered for a wide range of reasons and intentions, with a whole raft of different consequences. As attitudes in society change, so may the motivation to cohabit.[1] However, even though cohabitation may not achieve the Christian ideal of permanence, it is evident from the preceding chapters that there is a convergence of ethics for living together that can make cohabitation and marriage outwardly difficult to distinguish. There are differences, for example, one of the fundamental outcomes of marriage, is the establishment of kinship ties, a point often missed by commentators. Many couples choosing to get married give their priority to the creation of a 'perfect' relationship and a flawless wedding day, achieved by first living together. A perception that cohabitation and marriage are equivalent has arisen with an inevitable consequence that ever increasing numbers of couples choose to live together outside

[1] Thatcher, *Living Together,* Chap. 1.

marriage. Hence, cohabitation and marriage are now seen to coexist as lifestyle norms, sharing many similar aspirations and expectations.[2]

It became clear from the responses in the surveys in Chapters 4 and 5 that the church as a whole needs to react positively through its doctrine on marriage. Nevertheless, clergy and congregation members are beginning to question the motivations to cohabit beyond it being expedient to the economics of getting married. Cohabitation presents a challenge to the marriage tradition, driven by social imperatives. In this chapter, I expand the lifestyle aspects of cohabitation outlined in Chapter 1, going on explore some of the important historical and sociological developments that have helped shape attitudes towards cohabitation and distinguish it from other forms of relationship such as common law marriage. In this, I draw upon philosophical ideas arising from the Enlightenment through to recent authors (When the aim of this thesis is to explore how the church could or should react to couples living together as opposed to marrying, it is not possible to explore each and every possible factor that has led to the emergence of cohabitation). Finally, I develop sociological models that demonstrate how cohesion in society is changed by couples cohabiting instead of marrying.

6.1 Cohabitation and Lifestyle

When a couple cohabit, outwardly, their lifestyle may be indistinguishable from those who are married. Cohabitation and marriage both involve commitment: in marriage, the public declaration of their vows and promises, highlighted in the definitions discussed in Chapter 1, signifies a couple's intention to embark on a lifetime relationship. Cohabitation does not involve such a public declaration: it may be very difficult to judge a couple's level of commitment and how far it contributes to the stability of their relationship unless it is known to be a short-term precursor to marriage. Conversely, couples resisting the notion of marriage may find security in the very informality of their relationship, with its easy 'get-out' clause and potential for greater personal independence.

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[2] Duncan J. Dormor, *The Relationship Revolution: Cohabitation, Marriage and Divorce in Contemporary Europe* (London: ONE Plus ONE, 1992), 31. Dormor's prediction in 1992 that in Western Europe, living together before marriage will soon become a majority practice and that only those with strong religious conviction would still expect to live apart prior to their wedding has, in all probability, now been realised.

Although cohabitation assumes the appearance of marriage, there are some essential differences to be observed. Firstly, there are no givens or 'ground rules' to support cohabitation; cohabitation admits relationships that would be forbidden by canon or civil law, raising the possibility of irregularities such as liaisons between closely related partners, coercion, marriages of convenience. These are all practices that the Hardwicke Act of 1753 sought to prevent. Secondly, the kinship ties and responsibilities created through the formal exchange of vows that may have saved many a marriage from foundering are absent, creating a potential for greater instability. Cohabitation may be ended with the same informality with which it was established, creating a 'walk-away marriage'. However, there are probably few who enter marriage or remarriage without an initial intention to forming a lifelong union. (It cannot be denied that access to 'easy divorce' and remarriage has the potential to encourage a short-term mentality and a lifestyle that resembles serial cohabitation). If a cohabiting couple decide to separate, the breaking of the emotional bond may be as traumatic as any divorce: the trauma may be exacerbated by the absence of legal protections. Any aspiration to permanence is as likely to come through discussions by each partner separately with third persons as with each other.

There is no formal public recognition of cohabitation. Consequently, who is or is not cohabiting may be known only to close friends and family. Situations are created where no matter how sincere are a couple's intentions, their responsibility to society becomes secondary to the private nature of their relationship. The solemn promises that are central to both civil and church marriage are replaced by what may be no more than an assumed mutual consent, reflecting the informality of the arrangement.[3]

A factor that sustains all long-term relationships is that of commitment, and as a characteristic of cohabitation, is discussed separately.

6.1.1 Cohabitation and Commitment

The way the basic definition for cohabitation has been expanded into symmetrical and

[3] This statement does not imply that marriage is totally free from secrecy: through the issue of Special Licences that establish that both partners are legally free to marry, the marriage may be arranged with a minimum of publicity and attention.

asymmetrical relationships in Chapter 1 may be interpreted as an indicator of the commitment partners are prepared to show to each other. Commitment within marriage implies that all of one's personal relationships are irrevocably altered, brought about by the legal act of union confirmed through a marriage ceremony that instantly transfers loyalties and responsibilities. This forms part of our understanding of marriage as a rite of passage that signifies a change in responsibilities and mentality. The drift-in nature of cohabitation may obscure this sense of change unless the partners develop their own significant rituals. An intention to live in a committed relationship may require a total change of lifestyle through the inhibition of many of the freedoms available to single people: commitment is expressed through the suppression of self-centred attitudes to be replaced by mutual care and responsibility. This may be understood as, effectively, a termination of one's former lifestyle, what may be referred to as the death of singleness. Although a cohabitating relationship may ultimately break down, one's former lifestyle can never be recovered in the same form. This is not to deny the right to pursue individual interests, but that such pursuits are conducted within the framework of a joint relationship. With its inherent assumption of personal independence, the nature of the bond within cohabitation would be expected differ from that in marriage.

Commitment may manifest itself at several different levels. Firstly, we may consider couples cohabiting with a firm commitment to marry. There are practical issues that may delay their marrying.[4] Couples see no necessity to delay living together, given the protracted timescales for booking reception venues or even the place of the wedding itself.[5] Also, the present day imperative of having a house and home established by the time of their marriage is a further incentive to live together whilst their wedding plans are put in place.

The joint purchase of a house, whether or not with marriage in mind, is a strong indicator of an intention to live together in a faithful, committed relationship. The initial step is often one partner moving in with the other: even though they may share daily expenses, this often creates an asymmetrical 'host-guest' relationship, as described in Chapter 1, and does not guarantee the same degree of security as when

[4] See, for example, *StC*, 114.
[5] Cohabitation shares a certain commonality with the ancient practice of betrothal but the informality of cohabitation makes it more open-ended.

both partners have a direct investment in their home. It is through the act of setting up home together that couples may begin to face the challenge about which parts of their lives is it acceptable to keep separate and which parts need to come together, that is, the extent to which partners retain their identities as single persons living in a joint relationship. At a more fundamental level, the joint purchase of a house helps create a symmetrical relationship that has a greater potential for stability.

Secondly, there are couples cohabiting without a current intention to marry but often with an expectation of marriage or at least a long-term relationship. A couple may have sufficient love and affection to sustain their current relationship, but not the commitment or confidence to embark on marriage. Where the two partners reach the decision to want to marry at different stages, a transient asymmetry may be introduced into their relationship. It can never be assumed that marriage has been discounted for all time by either partner, only that marriage is not right for the couple until the asymmetry is resolved.

Thirdly, there are couples who consciously reject the concept of marriage altogether, seeking not just a substitute for marriage but something different.[6] A frequent claim is that their relationship is sufficiently strong not to need the support and resources that marriage brings to a relationship, taking on board only those values that suit. There may be many reasons for couples to reject marriage in favour of a less formal lifestyle, notionally free from any constraints or interference by church, society or peer group. Cohabitation generally assumes greater individual freedoms and the fulcrum in their relationship may be at a very different point than if they were married. This may be one of the reasons some couples feel uncomfortable with the concept of marriage: it is not to say they have any less commitment than they would in marriage but that they have chosen to keep some parts of their relationship private, meeting their own expectations, outside any public or formal structure.[7]

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[6] A non church-going male, introduced to me by one of the clergy survey respondents, has cohabited for 11 years. He regards cohabitation a means of sustaining a committed and stable relationship whilst preserving an illusion of freedom. He also believes that the longer a couple cohabits, the less marriage is needed in terms of commitment and security. Two reasons that would encourage him to marry are if financial disadvantages increased or if there were children involved. His belief is that as cohabitation becomes more established as a normative lifestyle, social pressures will remove many of the existing legal and financial disadvantages.

[7] A couple I know had a long-standing relationship, but realised that gay friends were being offered legal security through Civil Partnership that they were being denied. They resolved the issue by undergoing a civil marriage, signing the register without any ceremony, or friends or family present. They have kept their separate names and claim that their marriage has not altered the social nature of

Beyond these three groups, there will be couples prepared to enjoy their current relationship with no long-term aspirations and every intention of moving on when their relationship fails to satisfy their current needs. This leads to a pattern of sequential short-term uncommitted relationships, a lifestyle diametrically opposed to the intentions of marriage.

One interpretation is that commitment in long-term cohabitation is different to that in marriage, reflected through an aspiration to stability rather than permanence. It should never be assumed there are not exchanges of expectation and intention, whether through explicit declarations between the couple or implicit within their relationship. This is part of the courtship tradition and has some commonality with common law marriage that will be discussed below. In addition to whatever transpires between the partners, discussions by both partners with third-party confidents, maybe seeking reassurance as to the conduct and likely trajectory of their relationship, will form part of the process of determining commitment.

A factor not yet discussed in the context of commitment is that of children and family. There is evidence for increasing numbers of children born to unmarried parents from the statistics quoted in Chapter 2 (with qualitative support from scans of newspaper birth announcements). It is clear that cohabitation is no longer necessarily a childless phenomenon and some implications of this are discussed below.

6.1 2 Cohabitation and Family

There is a tacit assumption that cohabitation, like marriage, is motivated through love, the emotional attraction that encourages two people to want to share their lives to the extent of living together and creating their own family. Love, through commitment, shapes the outcome and dynamics of a relationship: children and family are an important aspect of this, though there is understandable caution concerning the integration of family with cohabitation.[8]

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their relationship. When we celebrated a significant wedding anniversary recently, they had to admit that by not celebrating their marriage, such events would have very little meaning for them.

[8] Thatcher, *Liberating Sex,* 107.

The strong ethical imperative that prefers children to be brought up within a traditional marriage, discussed by Duncan Dormor, is probably now much weaker as society becomes more tolerant of children being brought up in stepfamilies, by cohabiting couples or single parents. Dormor argued strongly that marriage maintains the continuity of the generations, but cohabitation distorts this paradigm of family life, warning that

> should cohabitation become a widespread choice for parenthood, marriage could become irrelevant as an expression of commitment.[9]

What Dormor is saying is that marriage could become a minority choice for couples wishing to confirm their commitment: recent statistical evidence would suggest that since a majority of couples cohabit before or instead of marrying, this has probably already come about. Since the social stigmas attached to children born to unmarried parents have largely disappeared, family life has become part of cohabitation, even though it is still only marriage that confers full legitimacy and parental responsibility for their children: the term bastard, meaning literally, one begotten and born out of wedlock has largely disappeared from common usage.[10] This may be yet another example of young couples having been given so much freedom in their formative years now following their own rules without reference to traditional norms. Rather than resist these changes, the prevailing attitude seems to be to accept cohabitation as a paradigm that converges towards the nuclear family, maybe in the hope that responsibility for children will encourage greater stability in relationships.

The assumption that the children in a relationship are the progeny of the two partners is not necessarily true: many couples form relationships where there are already children from previous liaisons. Evidence for the deprivation of children in terms of shorter lifespan, poor nutrition, greater propensity to illness and less successful careers where they are brought up in families where the parents are not their biological parents is emerging. Another factor is that lack of cohesion in the family

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[9] Dormor, *Relationship Revolution*, 31.

[10] There are some interesting colloquial expressions for bastard, such as 'not born of the hearth' (old English), a 'pack saddle child' (Portuguese), a 'child born in a barn' (old French) (see Ernst Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1971), s.v.; Schillebeeckx, *Human Reality*, 238).

structure may lead to actual abuse.[11]

Although many cohabiting couples do go on to get married, there is a perception, not easily quantified, that the offspring of long-term cohabiting couples are more likely to cohabit in their turn. Thus cohabitation will have an impact on family life beyond the immediate generation. A risk posed to children of a cohabiting couple is that they become disadvantaged through the potential 'get-out' clause: children are not always now regarded as essential to the fulfilment of a relationship that, increasingly, is replaced by elements of self-fulfilment. A couple may be less likely to stay together 'for the sake of the children', as was the case for previous generations when couples in a failing marriage would put their relationship aside to support their children. However, it is difficult to be totally idealistic here: families are generally more affluent than now and divorce is much easier, hence it may be that a family can now afford to take a more realistic view of its well-being.

Cohabitation engenders acts of freedom of expression and self-determination that have been influenced by social reformers arguing for greater equality and opportunity. Many of these ideas have been stimulated through the Enlightenment, discussed below.

6.2 Cohabitation and Sociological Development

Modern philosophical debate on marriage gained momentum in the nineteenth century: this was during a time of rapid urbanisation as manufacturing industry increased in scale, becoming factory rather than cottage based. There was a huge impact on family life through overcrowding, poor sanitation and associated health problems in the towns and cities with their high density of housing. In this environment, women could find themselves severely disadvantaged, economically as well as socially. It was against such circumstances that the Enlightenment led to some far-reaching reforms.

Marriage in the Western Christian tradition was, until relatively recently, overtly

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[11] Thatcher, *Families*, 120-1. See also A. H. Halsey, 'Foreword', in Norman Dennis and George Erdos, *Families Without Fatherhood* (London: Health and Welfare Unit, Institute of Economic Affairs, 1993), xii.

patriarchal, based on codes that date back at least as far as the ancient Judaic culture. There were two main aspects, particularly as they affected women: the first was that the husband was given control over the household and the second was that the wife had few, if any, rights to divorce if, for example, her husband was unfaithful or abused her.[12] It is only in the latter half of the twentieth century that through changes in the marriage liturgy, wives have no longer been required to promise to obey their husbands.

Many of the Enlightenment arguments centred on a marriage tradition that through its interpretation of creation gave husbands authority over their wives. John Locke, for example, writing in the late seventeenth century, argued for equality between men and women in marriage: in the first Creation narrative, man and woman were created as husband and wife with equal status, not as master and servant.[13] Though his argument was that marriage was the natural relationship for a man and woman, he did support the handed down tradition insofar as the primary purpose of marriage was procreation and the nurture of children. In his treatise, he sought to counter the arguments of Robert Filmer, a traditionalist and monarchist, who maintained a hierarchical structure of marriage.[14] Such arguments provided a prologue for the debates that followed on the nature of society and how the human institutions could be better understood through reasoning and logical thought than through faith and church doctrine.

An early start to the debate on women's role in the family and society came through the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* by Mary Wollstonecraft.[15] First published in 1792, it may be considered one of the first truly feminist documents, arguing as it did against some of the entrenched ideas that caused women to be marginalized in society. Her starting point was to challenge the established order

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[12] This was not true of all ancient cultures. In Assyrian and Babylonian marriage contracts dating from C19 BCE, the husband and wife both had powers of divorce, with specified payments to the other. In the isolated island Jewish community of Elephantine on the Jewish-Egyptian border in 420 BCE, husband and wife had equal divorce rights with payment of divorce money or return of endowment. On the death of one spouse, there was provision for the children to inherit as well as support for the surviving spouse. A Roman-style marriage contract from Egypt required the man and wife to cohabit, as well as obedience by the wife. However, the husband was expected to be faithful, and was forbidden to take a mistress, concubine of male lover! See Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Marriage*, 9-11.

[13] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government (1698)*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1960), II.2; Mervyn S. Johnson, *Locke on Freedom: An Incisive Study of the Thought of John Locke* (Austin, Texas: Mervyn S. Johnson, 1977).

[14] Locke, *Treatises*, I.47.

[15] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol H. Poston (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2nd ed. 1975).

that had come about through the hand of humankind:

> God has made things right, and that error has been introduced by the creature whom he formed, knowing that what he formed, is as unphilosophical as impious.[16]

And

> It cannot be demonstrated that woman is essentially inferior to man because she has always been subjugated.[17]

This assertion has a direct parallel in Rousseau's *Emile* that begins:

> God makes all things good: man meddles with them and they become evil.[18]

Wollstonecraft argued strongly that women should be better educated, asserting that the general attitude of men was to

> secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood.[19]

An important contributory factor impeding the development of women's freedom and equality came through marriage itself. Women, in her view, were too often forced to be subservient to their husbands:

> Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience; but, as blind obedience is ever sought for by power, tyrants and sensualists are in the right when they endeavour to keep women in the dark, because the former only want slaves, and the latter a play-thing.[20]

Wollstonecraft is not necessarily arguing against the role of women in the home, but that she should be shown more respect and greater responsibility for its organisation and management. Furthermore, she invokes the concept of friendship as one of the sustaining forces between husband and wife, a theme that will be addressed in Chapter 7:

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[16] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Woman,* 14.
[17] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women,* 37.
[18] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: 1911), 5.
[19] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women,* 20.
[20] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women,* 24.

> . . . the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend and not the humble dependant of her husband.[21]

Even Wollstonecraft is forced to admit that :

> I will allow that bodily strength seems to give man a natural superiority over woman; and this is the only solid basis on which the superiority of the sex can be built.[22]

Wollstonecraft's concern was that women should not be allowed to dwell in marriage as

> A fanciful kind of *half* (sic) being – one of Rousseau's wild chimeras.[23]

Apart from her repeated condemnations of the inequality suffered by women in marriage, the education she sought was not the private education in which the upper classes indulged, but that there should be a common education available for all boys and girls, studying similar subjects:

> If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfil the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens. . . marriage will never be held sacred till women, by being brought up with men, are prepared to be their companions rather than their mistresses.[24]

There were those, however, such as James Fitzjames Stephen, who regarded men and women as inherently unequal by Biblical authority, given through creation.[25] Stephen goes on to argue that a patriarchal model for marriage was inevitable if the Christian ethic for permanence was to be maintained. A wife cannot fulfil her role as a 'help-meet' without being placed in an inferior position to her husband. This generates a

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[21] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women*, 29.
[22] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women*, 39.
[23] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women*, 39.
[24] Wollstonecraft, *Rights of Women*, 165.
[25] James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*, ed. Stuart D. Warner (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 15; Witte, *Sacrament to Contract*, 198-9.

hierarchy in marriage redolent of civil institutions and the monarchy that Stephen regarded as part of the natural order for society. An inevitable consequence for women was the risk of being abused or raped by her husband: Stephen conceded that this could and did happen, and technically, the husband could be punished. However, husbands were rarely prosecuted because few women before modern times had sufficient resources to live independent lives and unless a wife could support herself, had to endure the injustices that marriage inflicted on her. Although this may have presented unpalatable situations, Stephen did not consider that the solution was to be found within reform of marriage laws.

The argument so far has concentrated on the married woman. However, a group of women not so far considered were widows: through wars, injury and disease, many men died young, before they had amassed any sort of wealth, leaving their widows very poor, even destitute. From about the sixteenth century onwards, the economy was, in general, improving as many men became established as successful farmers and artisans, so that when they died, their widows were becoming better provided for.

There were strong reasons for the poorest widows to remarry, to obtain the support of a new husband for themselves and father to their families, particularly if he showed signs of being a successful entrepreneur.[26] However, there were also risks attached: the new husband could equally turn out to be a drunkard or idle and fail to provide for his new wife and not give sufficient nurture to his her children. Indeed, she may feel she could bring them up better herself even if existing on meagre resources. Barbara J. Todd argues that widows may have actually resisted remarrying either out of loyalty to their husband's name, or even, in some cases, neighbourhood disapproval.[27] A further caution from 'society' was that widows seeking husbands risked destabilising the married population if there were not enough single men available. A further deterrent to remarrying, particularly for the wealthier widow was that before the Restoration years, she could be forced to forfeit her wealth on remarriage where, by law, her husband had the right to confiscate her estate. Clearly, where a widow had the choice whether or not to remarry, by retaining her widowhood, she avoided the potential trauma,

[26] This was a time when most couples married under common law.
[27] Barbara J. Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', in Mary Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London: Methuen, 1985), 79.

subordination and abuse found in many a marriage.[28]

6.2.1 Nineteenth Century Enlightenment and Marriage as Contract

Following the publication of Wollstonecraft's treatise and other works, philosophical debate on the conduct of social institutions gathered momentum. The abuses brought about through the traditional model for marriage were becoming recognised, with the result that the church was often seen to be complicit in perpetuating social structures that greatly disadvantaged women. Prominent amongst the protagonists was John Stuart Mill, who through a series of newspaper and other writings, influenced many of the social reforms that helped reshape society over the next two hundred years. Arguing for a contractual model for marriage, Mill garnered support for the introduction of reforms in English marriage and family law.[29]

In 1833, John Stuart Mill wrote

> Marriage law, which, as at present constituted, is one of the worst of our social institutions – a law which permits the stronger party to evade with impunity every one of the essentials of the contract, while the misery of an ill-assorted union is left to press upon the weaker with unmitigated burden, without hope of relief . . .[30]

The argument was not for an outright rejection of marriage but that there should be a radical reappraisal of marriage law to reflect the equal status that men and women were beginning to assume in other areas of society.[31] Cohabitation and other relationships outside of marriage were not part of enlightenment philosophy. But patriarchal attitudes within the marriage tradition inhibited women's freedom and subjected them to frequent abuse.[32] Marriage, in its traditional form, posed very specific challenges to a woman's sexual expectations: a persistent argument was that

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[28] Typical examples from this period feature in a study of records relating to Abingdon: Barbara J. Todd, in Prior, *Women in English Society*, 74-5.
[29] Witte, *Sacrament to Contract*, 206.
[30] John Stuart Mill, *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. XXIII: *Newspaper Writings August 1831–October 1834*, ed. John M. Robson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 557.
[31] Harriet Taylor, 'The Enfranchisement of Women (1851)', in Mill, *Collected Works*, XXI, 408-9.
[32] Mill, *Collected Works*, vol. XXI, *Essays on Equality, Law and Education*, 45.

> a woman should not 'desire any sexual gratification for herself, but that she should place her own needs secondary to those of her husband'.[33]

Mill held to the view that marriage amounted to the institutional subjugation of women, contrary to natural order. He argued that through the strength of the church, attitudes had not changed greatly from Judaic times, continuing to treat a wife as her husband's property and subordinate to him in the conduct of their relationship. This inevitably acted against women's interests.[34] His aim was not to reject the ideals of marriage: he perceived that, for example, the ideal for permanence in marriage contributed to the stability in society. However, where a marriage has broken down, there should be legal freedom to seek a separation or divorce by either spouse.[35] The outcome of his deliberations was a move towards a contractual understanding of marriage: a marriage could and should be rendered null and void if the 'terms of contract' were broken, releasing the parties from any agreement or commitment.

Education was regarded as a primary means of removing the 'evils' of marriage and a means of promoting fulfilment and happiness for both men and women.[36] Although women would continue to want to have children, this did not justify them being educated solely for procreation and the raising of families.[37] In the nineteenth century, educational opportunities for women, particularly in the professions, were limited and most women depended on marriage for economic support. In this regard, Mill does not appear to address the plight of a great majority of working class women in the nineteenth century who had to contend with inadequate housing, disease, and childbirth mortality. What Mill and his contemporaries could not have envisaged was the massive expansion in women's education and opportunities in the twentieth century, contributory factors that may have led many both inside and outside the church to challenge the role of marriage in the post-modern era.

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[33] Lord Acton, cited in William Manchester, *The Last Lion* (Boston: Little, Brown Press, 1983), 92.
The abolition of Negro slavery had had only recently been accomplished, and remained fresh in people's minds. Hence Mill is able to make frequent comparisons with slavery in order to justify his arguments against many of the social abuses of the time (Mill, *Collected Works,* XXI, 32).

[34] One of the abuses highlighted by Mill was rape in marriage that stemmed directly from women's subordination to men (see Witte, *Sacrament*, 12). This is an aspect of marriage that has been much debated in the late twentieth century alongside changes in sexual attitudes.

[35] Mill, *Collected Works,* XXI, 46-7.

[36] Mill, *Collected Works,* XXI, 46.

[37] Harriet Taylor, in Mill, *Collected Works,* XXI, 377.

In spite of his philosophical stance, Mill still shared much in common with the traditionalists. Many of his arguments for social change, for example, were negated by his personal view that within marriage, a woman was ideally suited to supervising the servants, and keeping the home in good order. The great occupation of women, he confided, was 'to beautify life'![38]

Women continued to be suppressed and abused in marriage in spite of legal reforms to promote greater equality, notably Acts to make divorce easier with civil remarriage in Register Offices. The state gradually became the arbiter of marriage law, setting minimum requirements to be satisfied to establish a legal marriage, taking priority over religious laws where there is conflict. Couples had the freedom to accept additional religious constraints on marriage, but these, as now, became voluntary.[39]

Although women gradually achieved greater legal equality and autonomy in family relationships, their general lack of educational opportunities and poor control of their fertility prevented most women from achieving control over their lifestyle. This situation changed little until the second half of the twentieth century, when developments in reliable contraception and better access to higher education enabled women to change their role in society. Women eventually developed the potential to become sexually as well as socially independent and though this in itself did not necessarily lead to cohabitation, changes in attitudes to human sexuality have encouraged couples to shun marriage and live together.

6.2.2 Cohabitation and Twentieth Century Socio-Technological Developments

Advances in contraception during the late twentieth century have transformed the ability for women to control their fertility with confidence and certainty, giving them both sexual and social independence. A couple, whether or not they intend to marry eventually, may now live together as though married without risking the social rejection that used to arise through pregnancy outside wedlock. Although contraception, mostly unreliable, has been practiced since ancient times, it was

[38] Mill, *Collected Works*, XXI, 46.
[39] Witte, *Sacrament to Contract*, 208.

usually in the context of marriage.[40] A woman may now choose when, where and with whom she has sex, and in many ways, she may be perceived to be the controlling partner in a relationship, bringing about a reversal of the traditional patriarchal model. A consequence of women having autonomy over their own sexuality is that there has been a major transformation and redefinition of gender roles, particularly as regards procreation. In previous times, accidental pregnancies could be accommodated within families but unmarried girls who became pregnant risked being stigmatised by society.[41] Nowadays, she has the capacity to deny having a family to suit her own ambitions, or to deliberately conceive, either to satisfy herself or her partner, or, in a more sinister way, to manipulate her partner. Whether it is in marriage or cohabitation, either partner may assume the role of abused or abuser: sexual abuse may come from either side.

These changes in sexual attitudes may be seen as a consequence of what Anthony Giddens describes as 'plastic sexuality', that is, sexuality freed from the needs of reproduction: fertility becomes owned by the individual rather than the conjugate pair.[42] These trends led Giddens to consider the concept of a pure relationship that is

> entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it. [43]

Unlike marriage, there is no pretence to permanence in a 'pure relationship' but is instead, a sexual relationship harnessed to suit the needs of each partner. The traditional model for marriage is based on commitment, that embraces such qualities as faithfulness, chastity, fidelity, and continence: mutual attraction leads the partners to bind themselves in a special relationship based on 'love' (in parentheses because

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[40] Carol Adams quotes a furore in the press when, in a speech to the church, physician Lord Dawson declared in 1921 that 'birth control is here to stay' (Carol Adams, *Ordinary Lives* (London: Virago, 1982), 129).

[41] The Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 'allowed local authorities to certify, and detain indefinitely, unmarried pregnant women who were poor, homeless, or just 'immoral''. This attitude was 'explained' by a then understood link between sex before marriage and insanity (see Anthony Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 77).

I have anecdotal evidence of unmarried mothers being escorted to church from a local institution in Harrogate on Sunday mornings as late as 1960.

[42] In recent years, sexuality has been removed even further from the needs of reproduction through the development of artificial fertilisation techniques.

[43] Giddens, *Transformation of Intimacy*, 58.

love can be defined in so many different ways). Love in a traditional marriage demonstrates a wholeness through mutual care and comfort and the maintenance and protection spouses give to each other. It is a complementary arrangement: each couple must decide how to apportion household tasks and so on. Marriage signifies commitment and defines a framework within which sexuality may be experienced. In Christian theology, procreation has long been regarded as the primary function of sex, whereas Giddens' approach is to treat it as a prime determinant in the quality of a relationship. The pure relationship may include marriage but other relationships also. Rather than adhering to the ideals of permanence and the 'special person', the emphasis on establishing a pure relationship encourages transience and short-term relationships driven by self-fulfilment.

Giddens is not advocating new styles of relationship but is attempting to describe contemporary changes in social attitudes (that would not be possible without the advent of reliable contraception). My argument is that the pure relationship is in denial of the basic ethics of Christian marriage and is not merely giving it a different form by reordering the goods of marriage. Though Christianity has struggled to free itself from its patriarchal heritage, it maintains a view that sex is primarily for procreation, even if that is not now regarded as the main purpose of marriage. In the pure relationship, based on plastic sexuality, sex becomes recreational with procreation hardly mentioned, if at all.

When sexuality is presented in recreational rather than procreative terms, it creates a situation where a partner knows he or she can more easily move out of a relationship that no longer satisfies their current expectations. It can then be argued that the whole structure of relationships is founded on the control of fertility. An inevitable risk to society is that this encourages short-term attitudes and insecure, less stable relationships.[44] Plastic sexuality and the search for a pure relationship has some specific implications that reflect contemporary attitudes towards living together. Men and women can theoretically approach a relationship on much more equal terms, releasing them from adherence to the traditional gender roles implied and associated with marriage, though not necessarily from the emotional ties that distinguish a quasi-permanent relationship from a casual encounter.[45] More importantly, both partners in a

[44] Richard Holloway, '*Cohabitation*', The Archive Hour, BBC Radio 4, 7 May 2005.
[45] Holloway, '*Cohabitation*'.

relationship, whether cohabitation or marriage, may expect to have had more than one previous sexual experiences at a deeper level than casual friendship in the process of searching for the 'special person'. This can invite tensions through comparison with previous partners: furthermore, once a partner is rejected, there is generally no return to one's previous status. Insecurity may also arise if a cohabiting (or married) partner suspects that their partner's previous liaisons have not been fully resolved.

Society no longer denigrates the sexually experienced woman or differentiates between the 'pure' and 'loose' or promiscuous woman: women may now find they are actively encouraged to cohabit by those who have experienced disappointment or dissatisfaction in their marriage. For a woman, this creates a moral tension, whether or not to remain a virgin until she meets the 'special person', since loss of virginity means the giving up of something that can never be recovered.[46] The same is not true of men to the same extent: there has always been much greater tolerance shown towards pre-marital (nowadays, pre-relationship) sexually experienced men.

The concept of the pure relationship invites sociological problems based on differences in expectations similar to those that have caused many a marriage to founder. An important part of human behaviour is the natural desire to form relationships and procreate: in this context, the ancient Judaic concept of fulfilment through one's offspring still has validity. Giddens may succeed if his argument that a sexual relationship detached from procreation becomes an instrument of love and affection. What his pure relationship gives to both partners is greater opportunity to pursue career or other aspirations without the encumbrance and distractions of family

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[46] Sex is now regarded as a fact of life, often drawing no distinction between casual encounters and more serious relationships (Teresa Morgen, 'Bridget Jones's Theology: Reflections on Involuntary Singleness', *Theology* CVIII, no. 841 (2005), 32-9).

A group of teenage girls interviewed on radio, albeit ten years ago, nevertheless revealed some interesting and surprising attitudes. Their views fell into three groups: there were a significant number who declared their intention to remain a virgin at least until they met the person they would anticipate having a long-term relationship. If not marriage, it would be a relationship that would be marriage-like. Some had already lost their virginity, usually through a 'one night stand' or short-term relationship but were concerned that this might jeopardise their future reputation and prospects. A minority saw sex as recreational, something to be enjoyed at will. Both the first two groups, albeit still in their formative years, were swayed towards romantic rather than confluent love (BBC Radio 4, 27 July 1998).

Their discussion highlights two issues. Firstly, these young people were demonstrating a much greater sense of responsibility than would be assumed by Giddens and that traditional values still have a place in the female psyche. Secondly, it illustrates the change in culture (in the UK) where virginity through chastity *was the means through which women were able to establish an identity independent of marriage or a sexual relationship with men. Today, there are many other means through which women are able to establish their autonomy and be respected for what they bring as human beings into the world* (CHASTE, *Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe* (patron, Ann Loades), http://www.chaste.org.uk (Accessed 20 March 2007).

commitments: this is reflected in the statistics for couples being older when marrying and having families later.

The arguments developed by Giddens apply essentially to fertile women. The post-menopausal woman has, by dint of nature, already separated sexual function from procreation and therefore, does not need 'plastic sexuality', even though she may be divorced or widowed and looking for a new partner. She will distinguish between a 'good' and 'pure' relationship in the knowledge that, whether marriage or cohabitation, it requires a much more comprehensive framework of ethics and sexual satisfaction will not necessarily be her primary motivation. By ignoring the needs of all women, the analyses by Giddens begin to look less plausible.

6.3 Cohabitation and Customary or Common Law Marriage

Cohabitation is only one of many manifestations of informal marriage-like relationships that have existed: up to the Hardwicke Act, common law marriage was widely practiced. This appears to have been so much part of the culture that even though it has had no legal status since 1753, the notion of common law marriage has persisted until comparatively recent times. Many today still confuse cohabitation with common law marriage, resulting in false assumptions regarding their legal entitlements. Although common law marriage is no longer recognised in the UK, it is recognised in various forms in many other countries.[47]

The development of common law marriage in England dates back at least to the thirteenth century: it was then that, through the Merton Act, the church assumed both moral and legal control of marriage. Marital practices prior to that are uncertain, though the two essentials for a valid marriage, consent by both partners and consummation were already established.[48] For those families whose wealth was increasing, marriage was the means of legally affirming family matters such as

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[47] Many provinces of Canada, for example, still recognise common law marriage with legal rights over family and property (Quebec, though, has never recognised common-law partnerships as marriage: my conjecture is that this stems from the French Roman catholic influence). In general, a couple must live together continuously in shared accommodation for a minimum period that varied between twelve months (Nova Scotia) and three years (Ontario). They must also *portray themselves as a couple to the outside world* and *share the traditional functions of a family* ('Common Law Separation Canada' http://www.Common-law-separation.com/common-law-separation-Canada.htm (Accessed 8 May 2007)).

[48] Gratian, *Decretum*, C.27.q.2, quoted by Brundage, *Law*, 433.

property ownership, inheritance, and legitimacy. Inadequate control of marriage could lead to casual polygamy resulting in families of bastards and half siblings. However, church marriage at this time was expensive and out of reach of a largely peasant population who resorted to making private contracts, that became common law marriage.[49]

The form of vows proscribed by the medieval church were not exclusive to church marriage but could be used to establish a legal marriage under customary law, referred to as common law marriage. Common law marriage did not seek to circumnavigate the rules and ethics of church marriage but endeavoured to emulate them, and this is where it differs fundamentally from cohabitation. There were two ways of contracting or celebrating a common law marriage, through betrothal or espousal: these terms were not synonymous but had very explicit meaning, defining the stages by which the declarations of marriage could be made.[50] In betrothal, promises to marry are declared in the future tense, *per verba de futuro*. This harks back to the ancient custom of betrothal that was a promise by a man to take a woman as his wife at some future time: the marriage was not confirmed or complete until dowries had been exchanged and the relationship consummated. In all marriage at this time, once consummated, it was established in law and the contract binding for life.[51]

A common law marriage could be formed without 'betrothal' through the exchange of spousals or promises in the present tense, *per verba de presenti*, again, followed by consummation.[52] In a literal sense, this constituted a 'contract or mutual promise of marriage'.[53] The 'ceremony' could be done in public place or in a private dwelling, but wherever it was performed, it established the marriage from that time forward.

Common law marriage legitimised a relationship and embodied all the obligations and responsibilities that were part of the marriage tradition. The probity of the marriage

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[49] Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1977), 30.
[50] Stone, *Marriage*, 30-41.
[51] Stone, *Marriage*, 30. In mediaeval England, consummation implied no more than deposition of semen, not necessarily full intercourse (Brooke, *Marriage*, 98).
[52] R. B. Outhwaite *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500–1850* (London: Hambleton, 1995), xiii, notes that wedding vows today are always made in the present tense, indicating an immediate change in status (see also, *Common Worship. Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2000)).
[53] Stone, *Marriage*, 30. It is noted that wedding vows today are always made in the present tense. (see also Outhwaite *Clandestine Marriage,* xiii).

would not be questioned unless there was some irregularity: responsibility for determining this would fall on the local community, hence a need for a wedding to be witnessed.[54]

The very strong emotions and feelings aroused by marriage prompted many couples in medieval times to make their promises in the sight of God, 'in facie ecclesiae', thereby inviting God's favour on the match, even though no priest needed to be present (this latter point led to considerable confusion).[55] Common practice was to exchange their vows at the Church door, though if fearful of the Church and its authority, a more cautious approach would be to conduct their wedding no more than within sight of the Church.[56] One of the very real risks attached to common law marriage was that of inadvertent marriage, partners expressing their love and affection in such a way that they effectively married each other, when that was not their intention.[57]

Neither the Roman Catholic nor the post-reformation Anglican church recognised the ending of a marriage other than through the death of one of the spouses. This, strictly, applied to common law marriage also. However, in practice, with no registration or national law enforcement, couples married under common or customary law marriage could easily find ways to 'divorce' and 'remarry'. Desertion with an intention to marry elsewhere was a common device: Stone, for example, comments on the many deserted wives amongst the women of Norwich in 1570. With inadequate proof of death and no system for the maintenance of formal records, marriages could be rendered bigamous through previous exchanges of spousals. If a husband was in the army or at sea and not returned, a woman could remarry without being certain whether or not she was committing bigamy. Alternatively, a wife could have a halter placed around her neck and 'sold' to the highest bidder at auction (though in practice, the purchase was often pre-arranged).[58] There are elements of mutual consent to be found here, though with little formality. Certainly, the ease with which a marriage could be ended does have parallels with the 'walk-away' situation in cohabitation.

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[54] In my possession is a photograph of my late uncle as a child at the wedding of his uncle to a lady who became his future mother-in-law through a marriage of first cousins. Interestingly, they took a conscious decision not to have any children because of their close relationship.
[55] Stone, *Marriage*, 34.
[56] Brooke, *Marriage*, 249.
[57] Connor McCarthy, *Marriage in Medieval England. Law, Literature and Practice* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), 31.
[58] Stone, *Marriage*, 40.

At a time when many people were poorly educated, the Hardwicke Act of 1753 caused understandable anxiety amongst those already married under common law through a lack of understanding of its provisions and the strict declaration of the vows and promises. This prompted couples to question whether or not they were properly married, fearing that their marriages could be rendered null and void if the promises they had exchanged had not precisely followed the legal requirement. Errors or irregularities in the giving of consent could constitute grounds for what would now be described as annulment, though in practice, there is little evidence of this happening.[59] The safeguard was that the marriage was consummated: it was this more than anything that established a marriage to be valid and binding.[60]

Add to common law marriage the many other customary practices of marriage not involving a priest such as troth-plighting, handfasting, bundling, over-the-broom, it is hardly surprising that there should be misapprehension and uncertainty over a couple's status.

The Hardwicke Act effectively ended common law marriage in a move to have all marriages recorded and brought under state control, using the church as the means of achieving this. Common law marriage continued to be practiced but no longer carried any legal status.[61] As a private, almost clandestine arrangement, known only to those close to the couple, it exhibits some resemblance to cohabitation.[62] However, there are

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[59] R. H. Helmholtz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 74.

[60] Stone, *The Family,* 31.

[61] The General Register Office still advises cohabiting couples that their families in particular have little or no legal security (http://www.gro.gov.uk/en/RightsAndResponsibilities/DG_10026937 (Accessed 5 Feb 2007)).

[62] In Scotland, common law marriage became known as 'marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute' or 'MCHR', persisting until 2006. The informal vows 'de presentii' followed by intercourse that enabled a marriage to be established with little or no publicity, no expense and no interference from family were abolished in 1939. However, MCHR remained after this time: if a couple presented themselves as married for an extended period (not defined), there was a presumption that they had exchanged their consent and were effectively married. MCHR was abolished by the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006 (Brian Dempsey, 'Farewell Then Common Law Marriage', *The Journal* (Edinburgh: Law Society of Scotland, 2005), 54; M. D. A. Freeman and C. M. Lyon, *Cohabitation,* 7). However, Common law marriages in Scotland established before 4 May 2006 continue to be recognised (http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/Scotland/family_parent/family_Scotland/cohabitation (Accessed 17 April 2007)).

Adults in this country from the 1950s would almost certainly recall couples who presented themselves to society as a married couple, but who in fact, were living under common law or at least pretending to be married. As a child in the 1950s, my mother referred to a woman in our own neighbourhood as 'his common', though I did not appreciate the significance of this term at the time. I

significant differences between common law marriage and cohabitation. Firstly, marriage under common law was always in the public domain and (in principle) carried the same responsibilities and protections for other family members expected through formal marriage. The rules for marriage, on consanguinity, the wording of the vows or promises and the requirement for witnesses were prescribed by the church.[63] The description 'common law husband or wife' may in recent years have been supplanted by the term 'partner', but this does not of itself bring cohabitation and common law marriage any closer.[64]

There is indirect evidence for some form of cohabitation having been practiced alongside common law marriage, though not necessarily by the same groups of people. This comes from medieval marriage liturgies that sought to legitimise children of couples presenting themselves for formal marriage, suggesting that couples were already living in some sort of marriage-like relationship. Couples would need to legalise their situation by presenting themselves for church marriage if they wished to confirm their succession or inheritance. One possibility is that couples could not at first afford a proper wedding or had to cope with an unplanned pregnancy, circumstances that have parallels within the cohabitation debate. Whatever their reasons, if these situations were not commonplace, there would not be the need to accommodate them through a specific liturgy.[65]

Common law marriage was an informal arrangement but still carried the legal and moral obligations of marriage. It relied on the same spousals as in church marriage, but was not subject to canon law, even though it would still be subject to similar cultural impediments. In this respect, it would be open to the same critical analysis by Mill and others as church marriage. Common law marriage catered also for those without religious belief or whose circumstances would not permit their marriage under canon law, such as if they are divorced. This role has been fulfilled through the

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also knew a person in the 1970s who still referred to her partner as 'her common', a form of endearment that was by then, particularly unusual.

[63] During the Middle Ages, the Church had succeeded in gaining control of marriage law in England through the Statute of Merton, 1236, imposing a canonist view on marriage with disputes being dealt with through ecclesiastical courts: see M. D. A. Freeman and C. M. Lyon, *Cohabitation Without Marriage* (London: Gower, 1983), 6

[64] There is a vestige of the old system in that the Church of England still imposes residency rules for a marriage to take place in the Parish Church. In an age where so much of life is governed through personal data held on computer databases, this requirement is becoming increasingly anachronistic: when banns are called, couples are often not known to the congregation.

[65] Searle and Stevenson, *Marriage Liturgy*, 148.

development of civil law marriage that embraces all the legal requirements but removes any appeal to religious belief.

6.4 Cohabitation and Civil Marriage

Marriage from a religious perspective has already been discussed in Chapter 3. However, recent developments in civil marriage derive from a different mentality and moral framework than traditional marriage. There are some significant consequences arising from the current trends in civil marriage. Although the vows still embody the ideals of faithfulness, mutuality, and permanence, the marriage is contractual in nature, with mechanisms in place to dissolve a marriage with the right to remarry.

Civil marriage now embodies many of the ideas argued by Mill and his contemporaries for equality between men and women, finding its fullest expression in late twentieth century developments in the USA, under the Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act or UMDA.[66] Marriage is celebrated through a ceremony that has much in common with civil contract law. The underlying function of UMDA is to protect the fundamental right of free persons to marry.[67] All marriages are subject to obtaining a licence and registration, but may be established with a minimum of formality. There are few impediments to marriage: firstly, consanguinity is limited to first cousins or closer relatives: curiously, this includes relatives through adoption, even though they may have no connection with the parents' bloodline.[68] All marriages are subject to parental consent for persons under the age of majority. Marriages must also be free from duress or coercion: lesser constraints include drunkenness or mental incapacity.[69] Responsibility for compliance rests largely with the couple and relies upon their honesty to declare any impediment. Individual states may impose their own additional regulations.[70] If a couple find at some time later that there have been irregularities, any

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[66] UMDA is universal in that it prescribes minimum requirements for a legal marriage that is recognised throughout the USA (http://www.marriageequality.org (Accessed 10 March 2007)); Witte, *Sacrament to Contract,* 209).

[67] UMDA could not have been created prior to 1967, until when the crime of miscegenation made it illegal for a white person to marry a person of different race (www.gpc.edu/~wbroadwe/gamarriage (Accessed 8 March 2007)).

[68] My interpretation is that this comes about because legal adoption formalises kinship relationships similar to those established through marriage.

[69] It is alleged that footballer George Best and his partner were drunk at their marriage in San Francisco, but this does not appear to have prevented the marriage from taking place (*The Times*, 26 November, 2005).

[70] In Georgia, for example, consanguinity is limited strictly in accordance with the book of Leviticus. Up to 2003, marriage was the only relationship in which sexual intercourse between consenting adults

decision to nullify the marriage rests with the couple rather than through the automatic application of sanctions.[71] UMDA lays down minimum requirements for a legitimate marriage to be applied across USA but when the probity of a relationship rests almost entirely on the honesty of both partners, there is ample scope for irregular relationships and practices that conservative marriage legislation in the UK has sought to prevent.

Marriage under UMDA encourages attitudes that are ever more divergent from the traditional values of marriage, enabling parallels with cohabitation to be drawn.[72] Legally, marriage is regarded not so much as a unifying bond and declaration of mutual support as an association between two individuals based on civil rights, each with his or her own emotional and intellectual needs. The responsibility of each partner is primarily to himself or herself, from which it follows that self-fulfilment may take priority over the needs of the relationship.[73] Whilst the culture still manages relationships through the medium of marriage, couples are simultaneously given the means of dismantling a union with automatic rights to remarry. Within the Christian marriage tradition, the avowed intent at the outset is that marriage is for life and will be ended only through the death of one of the spouses. Through UMDA, marriage becomes a relationship having no more value than a contract that may be ended when the participants find it no longer serves their purpose.[74]

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was lawful. Consensual sexual intercourse between unmarried persons was described as fornication. Same-sex marriages are still not recognised, even if legal in another state. Likewise, since 1997, common law marriage is not recognised, unlike some other states such as South Carolina. This is effectively says that cohabitation is not legally recognised although it undoubtedly happens (http://www.gpc.edu/~wbroadwe/gamarriage.htm (Accessed 8 March 2007)).

A couple I know in New Jersey lived together before marrying. Their wedding in May 2002 took place at the groom's home, with a family lawyer friend, temporarily licensed by the local registrar, presiding over the ceremony. The service was brief, with no appeal to any impediment from either the couple or the witnesses. The view of the celebrant was that it was the responsibility of the couple and the Registrar to make sure there were no irregularities in their relationship.

[71] In Topeka, Kansas, a marriage between a man and a transsexual woman was retrospectively declared invalid, only when the rights of the 'woman' to inherit half of her late husband's estate was challenged in the courts, on the grounds she was born a man (*The Times*, 16 March 2002).

[72] A major debate current in USA concerns marriage itself. Marriage is legally defined as a heterosexual union, but there is pressure to have this extended to same-sex unions, claiming the present arrangements infringes 'equal rights' legislation. See, for example, Melanie Heath, 'Matrimony, American Style. Losing Sight of Shifts in Kinship and Family', *Feminist Theory* 6(3) (2005), 355-65.

[73] In Georgia, for example (and possibly other states also), neither the husband nor the wife is responsible for each other's debts and a husband does not have access to his wife's salary except with her consent. There are no rules as to how household chores are to be apportioned! A husband and wife have the right to the consortium of each other, defined as any service or benefit a person gains from their marriage. However, spouses may not touch each other's intimate body parts without the other's consent (Marriage in Georgia, www.gpc.edu/~wbroadwe/gamarriage.htm (Accessed 9 March 2007)).

[74] It is possible to make an intriguing connection between UMDA and marriage in ancient Judaic times. Both forms of marriage are effectively civil contracts: if ancient Judaic marriage were to be enhanced

Thus, it is clear that contemporary developments in civil marriage reflect many of the sociological ideas and arguments that have been developed since the nineteenth century. There are close parallels with the intentions and commitments implicit in cohabitation, but as marriage, embodies legal securities that are absent in cohabitation. When the emphasis in relationships is on the individual, as is increasingly found, it is easy to lose sight of the implications that cohabitation has for society as a whole. In order to address this aspect, I have developed sociological constructs to show ways in which marriage and cohabitation may interact.

6.5 Sociological Constructs for Marriage and Cohabitation[75]

The emergence of informal lifestyles, of which cohabitation is but one, has led to a weakening of the role of marriage as an element that helps define and regulate society. However, the full impact of cohabitation is less well theorised and this is explored through the development of models that show how an ideal society made up of two populations, single and married, is altered through cohabitation and other relationships.

6.5.1 Boundary Model for Singleness, Cohabitation and Marriage

Marriage separates society into two cultural groups, those legally married and those who are single, with a sharp dividing line between the two states :-

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to give wives similar rights to those enjoyed by their husbands, particularly in the matter of divorce, the two marriage systems become remarkably similar. This is not to say they necessarily share the same mentality: the Judaic imperative was for procreation, to seek God's blessing through their children. Marriage under UMDA focuses more on the rights and needs and fulfilment of the individual.

[75] The initial concepts of the Boundary model and Cone of Encompassment were developed during discussions with my then supervisor, Revd. Greg Hoyland, and formed part of my MA thesis entitled *Cohabitation as an Alternative to Marriage: A Theological Interpretation* submitted to the University College of Ripon and York St John, University of Leeds, in 1999. The discussions have been further expanded here to consider the impact of cohabitation on social cohesion.

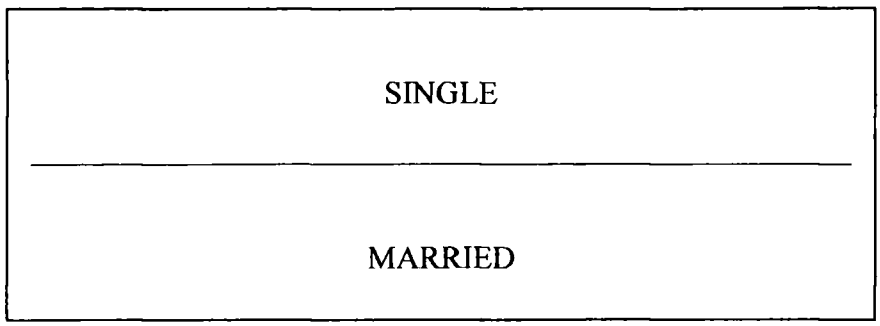

Fig. 6.1(a) Ideal-Type Society Divided into Single and Married

In practice, such a sharply defined transition from single to married has probably never been achieved, except perhaps in certain closed communities.[76] In the ancient Israelite culture, it is well known that there is no word for bachelor, suggesting that custom dictated that one would either be prepubescent and single, or else married. In Britain, in the Middle Ages, marriage commonly accompanied the transition from childhood to adulthood, or soon after puberty.[77] The evidence from history and elsewhere is that there have always been relationships that did not conform strictly to the social norms of the time. These and other practices throughout history have caused the boundary to become diffuse and described as 'fuzzy-legal'.[78]

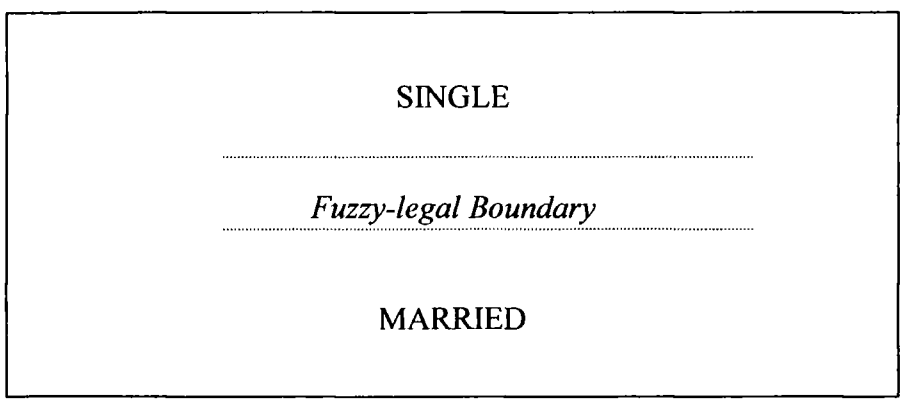

Fig. 6.1(b) Single and Married Divided by Fuzzy-Legal Boundary

There are at least three identifiable sources of boundary fuzziness. The first comes from marriage itself: the custom from ancient times through to the Middle Ages was

[76] A possible example may be the Amish in Pennsylvania, where relationships are very closely monitored.
[77] Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, ch.1.
[78] Morris, *Cohabitation*, 4

for a period of preparation for marriage, betrothal, where a person was no longer regarded as single, but at the same time, was technically not married.[79] In addition, if a married couple separate, this does not necessarily remove their married status, though the persons concerned may regard themselves as at least partially uncommitted and behave as though single. Others may be legally made single through bereavement or divorce but remain emotionally married and still proclaim their once-married status.

Secondly, fuzziness comes through irregular marriages, bigamy and polygamy. Prior to the Hardwicke Act of 1753, there was a long history of clandestine marriage in this country, marriages arranged often to secure inheritance or succession, and a couple could be technically coerced into a marriage that was strictly legal but one partner might remain emotionally single.[80] In the Bible, also, there are examples of marriage being manipulated or abused, such as when Jacob was tricked into consummating a relationship with Leah, Jacob's younger daughter, instead of his first choice, Rachael, to whom he had been betrothed. This effectively made Leah his wife.[81] Some cultures permit polygamy, though it is evident that not all the 'wives' fulfil all the obligations of marriage in terms of providing for the next generation.[82]

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[79] See 3.4.3.

[80] There were many ways, often with the connivance of the Church, by which marriage could be a clandestine affair. For example, up to the seventeenth century, the upper classes tended to marry in their own homes, in a private ceremony; though a priest would be present, there was ample opportunity to bend the rules to suit the families' wishes. Likewise, many Church marriages were conducted without banns or licence, suggesting that clergy were not too careful in their investigations; surrogates, clergymen authorised to issue marriage licences, could raise substantial revenues for church officials with many an irregularity ignored. Marriages could be conducted in relative safety in 'Lawless Churches', or 'Peculiars', which claimed exemption from visitations by a Bishop. As an example, St James' Church, Duke Place, London, claimed to be free from the authority of the Bishop of London, yet conducted about 1500 weddings per year, many of which were undoubtedly somewhat irregular. Prison Chapels such as at the Fleet Prison also assumed the status of peculiars, marrying people other than prisoners. Even after the imposition of a £100 fine for marriage without banns, the prison chapels were able to circumvent the regulations. When, in 1712, prison keepers became liable for penalties, the practice spread to 'marrying houses' within the Liberty of Fleet. Thus as measures were introduced to bring marriage under control, more and more ways of avoiding authority were devised. Clandestine marriages became recognised during the eighteenth century in that licence seekers were required to certify that the requirements of canon law were being fulfilled, but in practice, this was as open to abuse as any other. Thus the custom of marrying within one's domestic circumstances was slow to be eliminated, even though through persistence by the church. There were many advantages to conducting a wedding in relative secrecy, not only to cover up some illicit or nefarious liaison. Church weddings were expensive, and therefore less attractive to many of the population, and a secret wedding avoided the frequently boisterous pre- and post-wedding celebrations. Other reasons include the circumvention of parental disapproval, legitimisation of children, avoiding knowledge by potential objectors or troublemakers. These are all factors that continue to colour the marriage scene today and it should not be inferred that in the modern era with its current preoccupation with identity, registration and so on that marriage is now free from abuse. Several case histories are described in Stone, *Uncertain Unions in England 1660-1753* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[81] Genesis 29:10–29.

[82] King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, who died in 2005, was the eldest son of his father's, King Abdul's fifth and favourite wife, Hussah bint al Sudariri. His predecessor, King Khalid, son of wife number 2,

A third source of boundary fuzziness comes through adulterous sexual relationships outside of marriage: throughout history, extra-marital relationships through one or other of the partners straying into 'forbidden territory' has contributed to boundary fuzziness, particularly if they establish new quasi-permanent relationships. Whether from religious or sociological sources, the message has always been that adultery, promiscuity or fornication involving the exploitation of sexual relationships are unacceptable and threaten both the relationship itself and society as a whole.[83] Since earliest times, adultery has caused offence to communities as well as the parties concerned: witness the continued practice of stoning to death still practiced in some Muslim countries that is not far removed from the punishments meted out in mediaeval England such as burning at the stake for extra-marital conduct.

The impact of cohabitation is to make this 'fuzzy-legal' boundary much wider and diffuse. As already seen, the term cohabitation may cover a wide range of circumstances from short-term liaisons and those cohabiting prior to marriage to its adoption as a lifestyle choice on a long-term basis and a conscious alternative to marriage. This constitutes a special state of singleness where the partners are technically single, but within their relationship, may consider themselves effectively married. Furthermore, reciprocal movements between being single and cohabiting as partnerships break up and reform into new partnerships cause the boundary between lifestyle cohabitation and singleness to become equally diffuse :-.

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succeeded King Faisal, son of wife number 3. His predecessor, King Saud, was the son of wife number 1. King Abdullah, who succeeds him, is the son of wife number 7, and the new Crown Prince is the second son of Hussah. King Abdul is recorded as having 145 wives in total(!) (*The Times,* 2 August 2005, 22).

[83] Adultery is a partner having a sexual relationship outside of marriage, whereas promiscuity is having indiscriminate sexual relationships with several partners, usually unmarried. Fornication, translated from pornea, encompasses any form of illicit sexual intercourse including incest, homosexuality and bestiality.

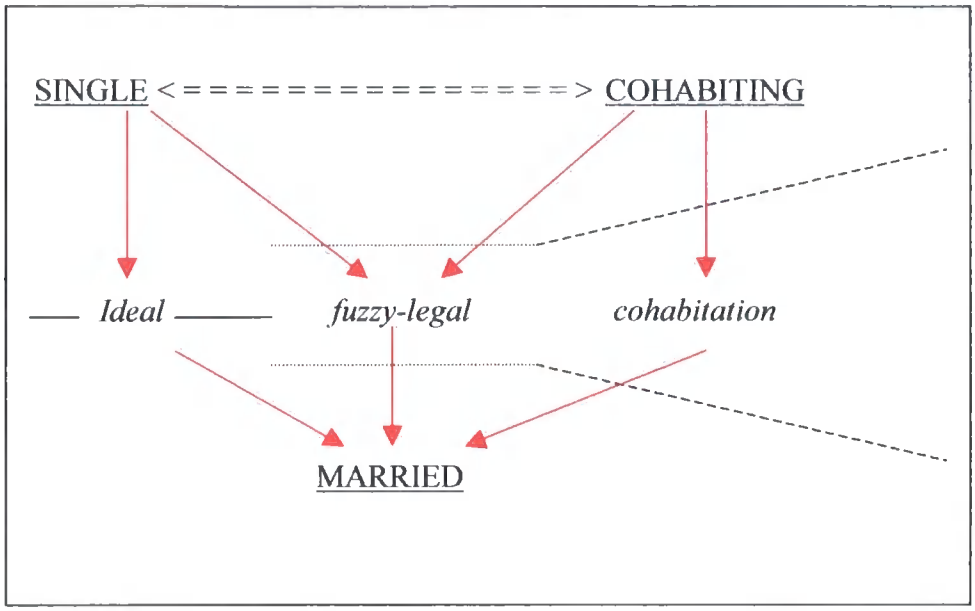


Fig. 6.1(c) Effect of Cohabitation on Boundary Model

The route from single to married is threefold. Firstly, there is the direct 'ideal' or traditional route from single to married; secondly, the ideal nature of the transition may be degraded if a couple has been in a sexual relationship but not actually living together to form a 'fuzzy-legal- boundary. Thirdly, there is a wider 'fuzzy-legal' boundary brought about through cohabitation. In addition, when cohabitation is inserted into the model, there will be reciprocal transitions between singleness and cohabitation and the potential for multiple transitions leading to serial cohabitation.

Even though cohabitation has become established as a normative relationship, it brings much less clarity to society: in addition to historical factors that have always been present, it creates uncertainty in the nature of relationships. Ways in which marriage and cohabitation interact are discussed in the next section.

6.5.2 Cone of Encompassment: A Model for Personal Relationships

The boundary model sought to illustrate the social implications of alternative lifestyles, marriage, and cohabitation. This is developed further through a model that I call a 'cone of encompassment': the couple, married or cohabiting, is placed at the apex of an inverted cone that expands to take in a succession of layers representing decreasing relationship to the partners. These layers are resolved into their immediate families, wider family members, friends, colleagues and acquaintances through to the whole matrix of persons that make up the community with whom the couple will have

little or no connection. There is a parallel here with Jack Goody's argument of a nuclear family governed by kinship.[84] The model can be used to show how the change from marriage to cohabitation conspires to alter established structures in society that help hold couples and families together.

6.5.2.1 Cone of Encompassment for Marriage

Marriage enables us to form new and valid relationships through the way a couple's links are forged through their family and friends to the rest of humankind, links that have ramifications far beyond the immediate union of the bride and groom. In the marriage cone, there is a well-defined vertical structure of layers as shown below :-

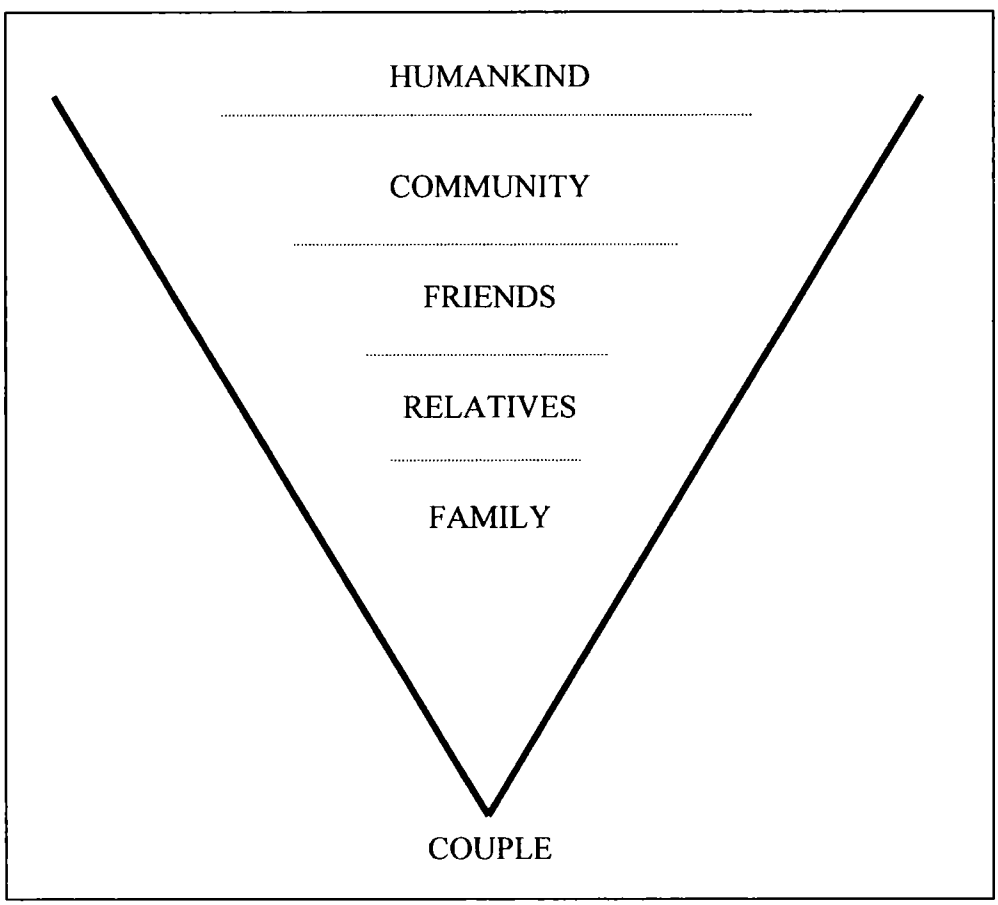


Fig. 6.2(a) Cone of Encompassment for Marriage.

[84] Jack Goody, *The European Family* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). One of the functions of marriage that is the establishment of lineage and kinship. Lineage is the linking of all relations, living, dead and yet to be born. Kinship includes those living, related through marriage, and who may have some special claim to loyalty and support (see also Stone, *The Family*, 29).

Marriage is a closely controlled public event and therefore the 'cone of encompassment' is shown as being well defined. Through subsequent marriages, one's 'personal cone' may be linked to other cones and this has the effect of creating a multiple structure. The links may be in any direction as marriages link different layers. The network of connected overlapping cones builds up a structural model for society, shown for two generations of marriage in Fig 6.2(b) :-

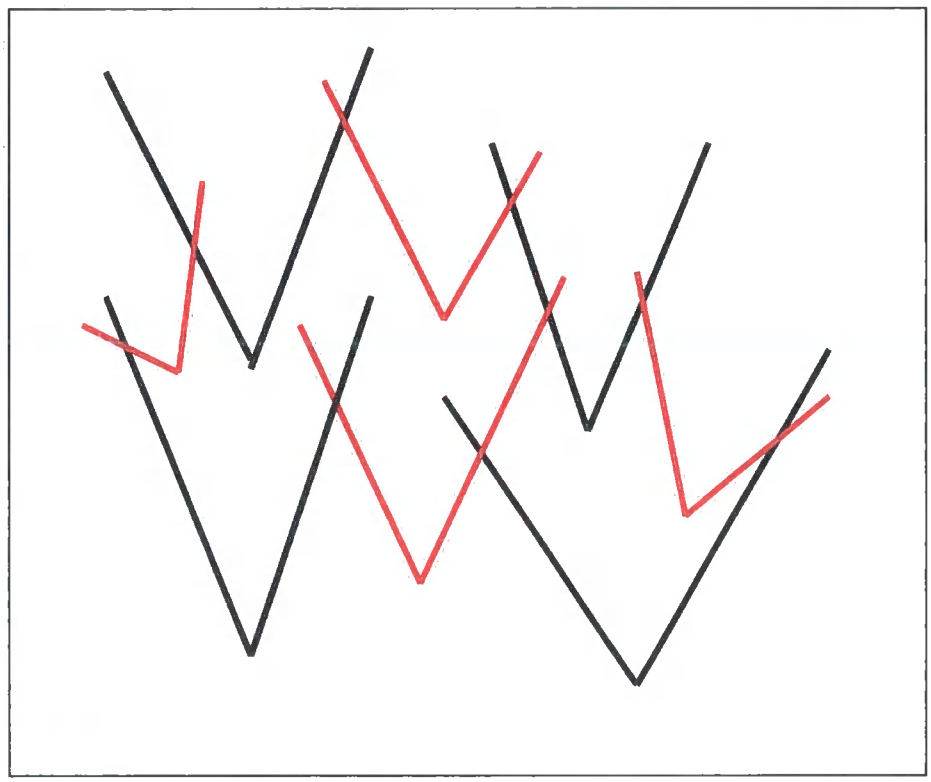


Fig. 6.2 (b) Strong Social Links produced Through Marriage

First Generation Marriages

Subsequent Generation Marriages

In this figure, black 'cones' describe an initial population of marriages. Intermarriages between partners from different cones are shown in red. This assumes an ideal-type society and shows how the process of marriage forges a network structure that gives a sense of cohesion. The links are never wholly static. New marriages are continually being formed as existing marriages cease through bereavement, divorce and separation. New cones are generated through subsequent generations marrying. Thus, the connected model transcends the generations, giving it a vertical as well as lateral structure, maintaining continuity.

The third and equally important attribute of the cone of encompassment is that through the delineation of the family with their established links, family responsibilities are defined. Under normal circumstances, these are taken for granted, but the model envelops care for 'family members by marriage' as well as along the bloodline. These responsibilities extend further: when faced with a crisis such as may be brought on by premature death, a relative may be required to assume responsibility for family members two or more stages removed. With cohabitation, links like these are less well established, as will be demonstrated below.

6.5.2.2 Cone of Encompassment for Cohabitation

When the couple are not married but merely living together, the couple may again be placed at the apex of a cone, but both the vertical and inter-cone links are weakened and the cone of encompassment is narrower and drawn with broken lines :-

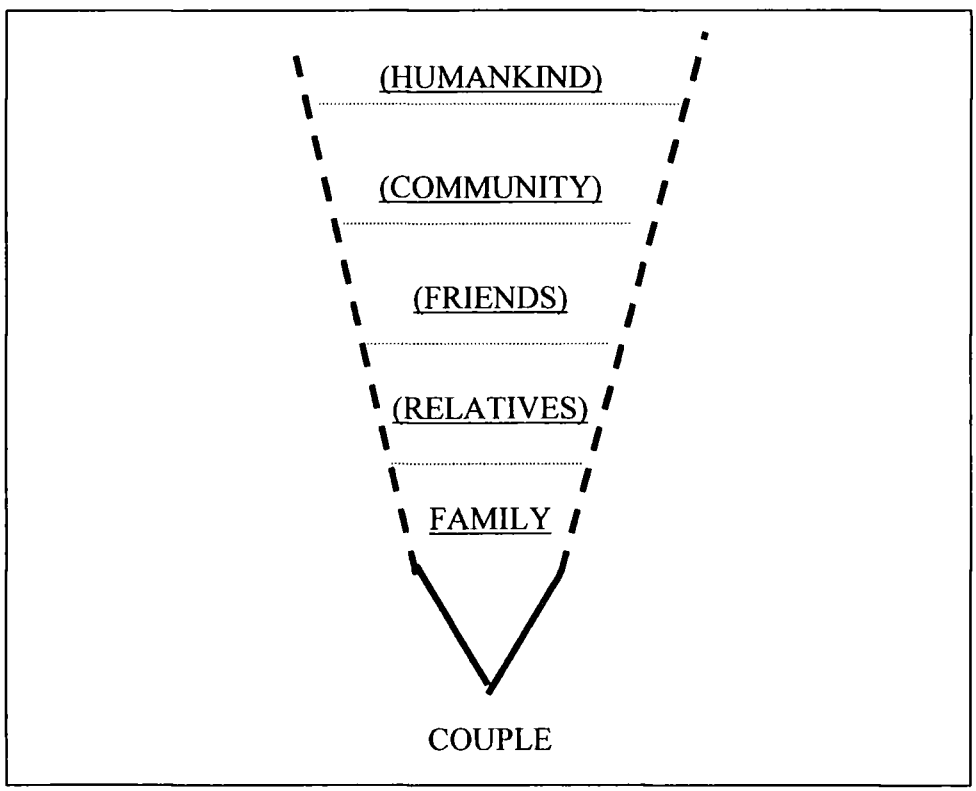


Fig. 6.2(c) Cone of Encompassment for Cohabitation.

The vertical links need not encompass the couple's immediate families: it is not unusual for families to be reluctant to recognise or even be unaware of a cohabiting

relationship. Hence the upper layers of the cone become diffused and ill defined: though there is the potential for a coherent structure, the informality attached to cohabitation leads to a lack of definition indicating the uncertainties in the couple's own cone of relationships.

Links with other cones exist between individuals in the same way as through marriage, but where they are made through cohabitation, the relationship exists in an unbounded state and similar degrees of social cohesion will not be achieved. Cohabitation, even if entered with a long-term expectation, carries a greater risk of becoming a transient relationship: families are not linked as they would be through marriage and family responsibilities are much more diffused.

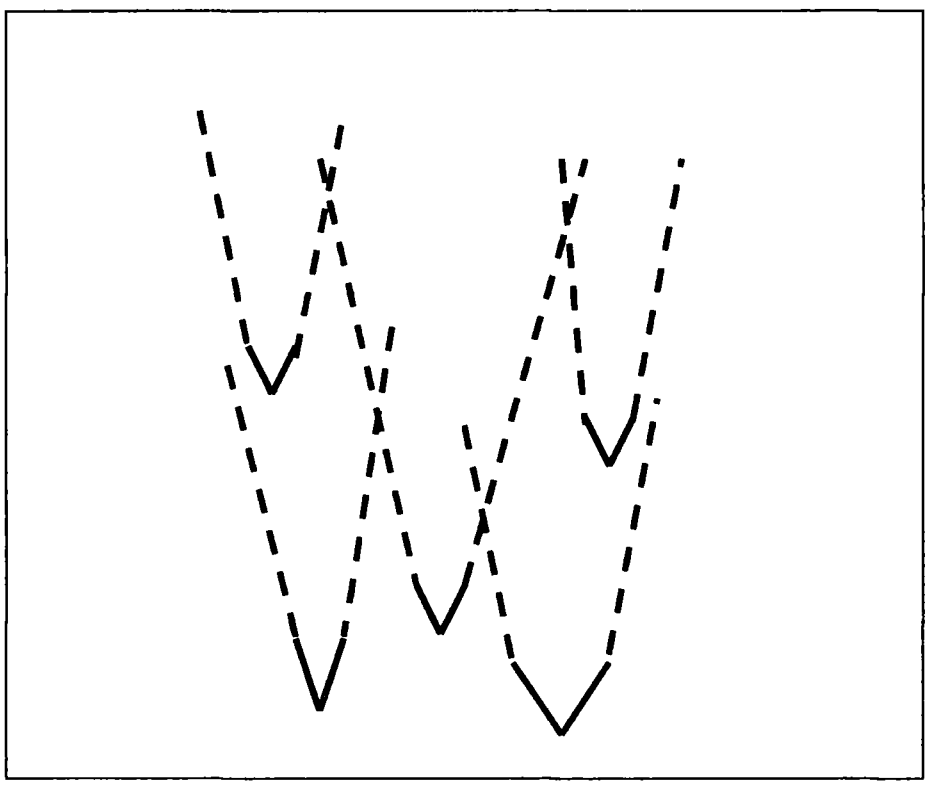
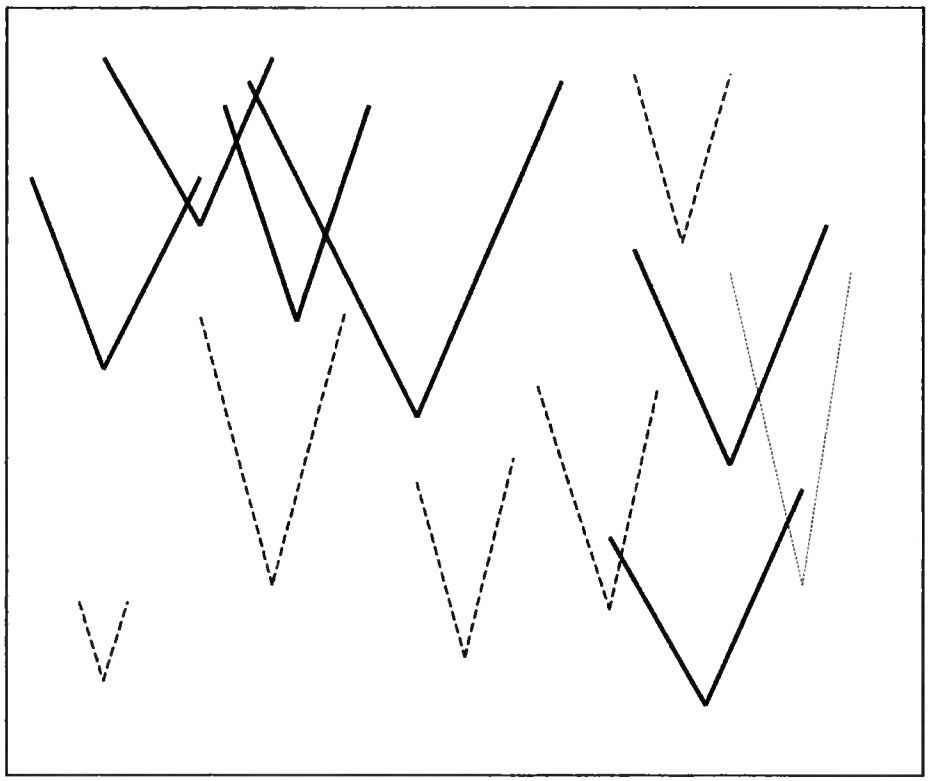


Fig 6.2(d) Weak Social Links Produced Through Cohabitation

Whereas marriage creates strong, long-range links binding society into a coherent structure, the links created by cohabitation are weak and short-range. In society today, there is a mixture of marriage and cohabitation, and already, where a second generation is cohabiting, the order of society may be weakened. With the informality

and potential lack of stability in cohabitation, kinship relationships, if they exist, become transient, lacking the permanence they are given through marriage. If cohabitation were to become the dominant lifestyle, a situation that is not unimaginable given current trends and rising extra-marital birth rates, the order created through knowing how people are related beyond short-range relationships could be lost. If society becomes comprised of couples constantly dissociating and forming new relationships, it may be likened to a Brownian motion, as seen in liquids that are constrained overall but have no discernable structure. This illustrates the social consequence of cohabitation, with its combination of freedom, mobility and a potential lack or expectation for permanence bringing to society a high level of instability.

The real situation is that at any point in time, there will be a mixture of cohabitation and marriage :-



Solid lines – marriage.

Broken lines – cohabitation.

Fig. 6.2 (e) Co-Existence of Marriage and Cohabitation

In terms of the coherence that relationships bring to society, the ratio of numbers of married couples to cohabiting couples becomes important. Provided this number is high, there are sufficient long-range bonds to give society its sense of structure and cohesion and cohabitation does not pose a serious threat. However, as the ratio falls, cohabitation becomes more prominent: pockets of poor cohesion emerge as relationships become transient and kinship ties are not formally or properly established. From what is admittedly, a qualitative and interpretive approach, my judgement would be that the current level of cohabitation is already having an effect on society. This in turn is generating a perceptible demand to bring cohabitation into line with marriage and civil partnership.

The discussion above has assumed that all relationships, whether marriage or cohabitation, are freely contracted. In contemporary society, this is largely true for the Christian population (though for many, this may be a notional concept). A majority of marriages worldwide are probably 'arranged', and in this context, limits the application of this thesis. Within growing immigrant populations in this country, particularly those from Asian cultures, arranged marriages are becoming common practice, highlighted in the press from time to time.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

It has been argued here that attitudes found in cohabitation share a commonality with sociological ideas developed from the nineteenth century onwards. In this context, cohabitation assumes a functional role, based on the partners' current aspirations and expectations that do not necessarily incorporate a long-term view. As a lifestyle norm, it shares many of the features of marriage, but it is argued that particular aspects such as its informality distinguish it from marriage. This extends to common law marriage with which cohabitation is sometimes equated. Recent developments in civil marriage embody attitudes very close to those that define cohabitation and its informality becomes the only distinguishing feature.

The image of society at present is one in which marriage is still dominant and sufficiently strong to create a socially stable structure. However, I have argued that one of the consequences of cohabitation is a weakening of the bonds that define society through the non-establishment of kinship ties. This is demonstrated using

models. If cohabitation were to become the dominant lifestyle, displacing marriage, this may lead to less cohesion and greater instability within society. The evidence from the statistics presented in Chapter 2 is that the incidence of cohabitation is likely to increase. Given the outcomes from the sociological implications, the need for the church to encourage greater stability in all relationships is reinforced.

Society will continue to change and what we are seeing in cohabitation may be a transitional phase in relationships that could go in several different directions. There could be a return to traditional family values, as society becomes increasingly dependent on legal entitlements, assuming these continue to be acquired only through marriage. Alternatively, cohabitation may become the dominant lifestyle, acquiring the privileges of marriage by virtue of living together but retaining the assumed freedom to separate. This conjures an image of transient relationships with an increasing fragmentation of families, step-parentage and so on. A further consequence of more frequent break-up of relationships is the risk of single parent families being created. This in turn, may lead to a greater proportion of (mostly) women choosing single parentage as their preferred lifestyle, and some evidence for this already beginning to happen is evoked in Chapter 8.

In the next chapter, there is an exploration of cohabitation within the theological context of marriage. This enables it to be brought into juxtaposition with marriage, linked through friendship and provides a rational basis from which the church might better address the issues raised.

Chapter 7

Cohabitation Within a Christian Theological Context

One of the principal aims of this thesis is to consider cohabitation in a theological context. In previous chapters, the rising prevalence of cohabitation in contemporary Britain has been discussed, in particular the way it reflects arguments brought about through the Enlightenment that exposed perceived weaknesses in the marriage tradition. The surveys of clergy and congregations showed a lack of understanding of the full impact that cohabitation is likely to have on the church other than contributing to a weakening of the marriage culture. In Chapter 3, the development of the marriage tradition underpinned by authoritative biblical interpretation has been resolved into two main traditions, sacramental and covenantal.

Society as a whole has long espoused some form of common law marriage. In all probability, this was a continuation of long established secular, pseudo-religious practices. In the Bible itself, there is scant evidence for marriage needing to be celebrated through a religious ceremony: the nearest examples is probably the marriage of Raguel and Anna in Tobit 7:15–9:12, dating from about 200 BCE. Although the bride's father performed the joining of their hands in marriage, there was an exhortation for God's blessing on the couple. Nevertheless, certain biblical texts were incorporated into medieval Christian marriage rites, indicating that for believers, marriage has always been more than just a secular arrangement.[1]

The exegesis presented here is not intended to supplant Biblical support for marriage but to broaden our interpretation of key texts. From Genesis and the creation narratives, I will argue that the integrity and quality of the relationship is important rather than the institutional framework. This is then extended into an embryonic theology of friendship that enables cohabitation and marriage to be linked into a continuum of relationships.

[1] Searle and Stevenson, *Marriage Liturgy*, 21.

7.1 Cohabitation and Biblical Exegesis

Marriage in the Christian tradition rests heavily on Jesus' interpretation of the ethics of marriage derived from his restatement of the creation narratives as discussed in Chapter 3.[2] Key verses such as Gen 2:24 are invoked by Paul and others in support of their teaching on marriage as a Christian institution. There is little or no evidence for cohabitation in Biblical times: any assumption of cohabitation during betrothal is uncertain and therefore all teaching then would be automatically in the context of marriage. Cohabitation nowadays is not necessarily always destructive of marriage since many go on to marry anyway: the task here is to try to find some support for relationships outside of marriage within the biblical tradition. This is particularly relevant since for many couples, their bond of love and commitment is established long before their wedding, by which time they consider themselves already married. The wedding has become the public affirmation of what has already been established privately. It is against this that the message of the Bible is re-examined, focussing on a reinterpretation of Gen 2:24, a verse that has become enshrined as a paradigm for marriage in the Christian tradition. There is no disagreement with the exegesis that Gen 2:24 is aetiological, intended to put the foregoing passages of creation into the cultural framework of ancient Israel.[3] My intention here is to show how it may be partially descriptive of other marriage-like relationships such as cohabitation.

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[2] In what is known of the original Hebrew text, 'ishshah, the feminine form of 'ish, a man, may be variously translated as 'woman', 'wife', 'bride' and other forms according to the context. The terms 'ish and 'ishshah distinguish man and woman as individuals, distinct from adam, representing humankind. Hence, Genesis relates to the individual relationships formed between men and women (Botterwicke and Ringren (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 222-235; Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament,* vol. 1, trans. Mark R. Biddle (Peabody, Massachussets: Hendrickson, 1997), 98, 187). *Gune* in the Septuagint (Mt 19:5) is invariably translated into English as 'wife' (Clinton Morrison, *An Analytical Concordance to the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), ad loc.). Whilst quoting the Hebrew scripture, Jesus appears to introduce a subtle change in emphasis to bring this verse in closer alignment with marriage. He is in fact using it in a similar way to his teaching through parables – using everyday experiences to support some eternal truth.

[3] Westermann, *Genesis*, 232.

Marriage at puberty, or at least, betrothal, was normative. This was something they all knew about and accepted, therefore would be no need to describe it to an Israelite audience. My own view is that Gen 2:24 is a concise restatement of Leviticus, reminding them of the household codes as they apply to marriage-like relationships. The essentials are that the relationship is formed between 'strangers' (in practice, not too closely related people. The intention of creation is that marriage is binding and provides a platform for orderly procreation and the sustenance of the Israelites. Thus, my argument is that Gen 2:24 has more to do with the probity of the relationship than the institution of marriage *per se*.

7.1.1 Cohabitation and Creation

According to Gen 2:18, God's first intention for the woman's role in her relationship with the man was as a 'helper fit for him' (RSV) or 'helper as his partner' (NRSV).[4] The relationship may be understood as a special friendship or partnership for mutual support and comfort, part of a creation in which men and women belong together in community with each other and can only reach their true humanity when this sense of community exists.[5] There is a relational quality described that is not owned solely by the marriage tradition but may be sought within all heterosexual relationships however they are described. When God made woman from the man, their destiny was to reunite.[6]

In Gen. 2:24, it is noted that the man *leaves his parents*, that is, both father and mother, found in virtually all translations. However, in the ancient Judaic culture of extended families, on getting married, a man would have been described as leaving 'his father's house'; the house, or household, was the living unit, often embracing extended families. In terms of family relationships, the couple would have formed a nuclear-type family embedded within the extended family.[7] Westermann accords less significance to the wording other than that it describes the formation of a new household in keeping with the Hebrew tradition: when marriage was such a well-established tradition, it seems strange that if the intention was to describe the institution of marriage, the phraseology is not more precise.[8] What this does say is that

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[4] Most translations describe woman created to be a helper (Gen 2:18) from the Hebrew *'ezer* meaning 'aid or help: *'ezer* may be traced through *'azar* that includes a deeper meaning to surround and give succour (Jenni, and Westermann, *Lexicon*), ad. loc. The word *'ezer* occurs nineteen times in the Old Testament and with each use, embodies connotations of spiritual help whereas *'azar* is more concerned with physical help. The translation of Gen 2:18, should not be read as being specifically sexual or physical help, but is personal community of man and woman in the broadest sense, describing mutual help and understanding, joy and contentment in each other (Westermann, *Genesis*, 233).

[5] Wilkinson, *Creation,* 39.

Westermann is also of a view that the writer is almost certainly invoking earlier traditions (Westermann, *Genesis*, 230).

[6] There is one Rabbinic understanding that man was created as an androgynous being, having both male and female parts. They were originally 'one flesh' and for creation to be fulfilled, they must come together again (Von Rad, *Genesis*, 82).

This argument is refined by declaring that in a bisexual or androgynous creation, 'maleness' and 'femaleness' are not absolutes, but determined by a relative predominance of one set of characteristics over another' (Jo Milgram, 'Some Second Thoughts About Adam's First Wife', in Gregory Allen Robbins (ed.), *The History of Exegesis* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 240).

[7] To be strictly accurate, in a patriarchal culture, the bride left her house to join her husband in his house.

[8] Westermann, *Genesis*, 233.

the breaking of the bonds between the man and his parents represents a separation from those previously nearest him to form a new primary bond.

Gen 2:24 proceeds to describe the couple coming together in a one-flesh relationship: the ethic for faithfulness and monogamy, allowing humankind to flourish in terms of forming families and providing for the next generation. One-flesh, from the Hebrew *basar*, is traditionally interpreted to depict the unity of a man and woman in a faithful, conjugal relationship.[9] The bond is qualified by *dabaq*, with the meaning to join, cleave fast together, interpreted as a permanent bond in marriage, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Although Gen 2:24 embodies the elements of Christian marriage, it is also a description of the marriage relationship. The important message is that in the process of leaving one's parents and forming a notionally permanent heterosexual bond the partners or spouses come from different stems: the relationship is formed between two 'strangers'. I consider this a major reason for its insertion into the text as an explanation of what constitutes a good relationship in terms of the continuity of humankind. In practice, many partners are not total 'strangers' in the sense of being completely unrelated: in Leviticus, permitted and forbidden relationships through consanguinity were defined. It is clear that the ancient Judaic culture had an awareness of the dangers posed through inbreeding and in modern parlance the maintenance of a healthy gene pool.

Thus, although Westermann argues that the attractive force between man and woman may be part of creation, marriage itself is an earthly institution and that the act of cleaving together is a description of the emotional power that sustains the bond.[10] The

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[9] There are numerous references to the use of *basar* as animal flesh or meat, especially in Exodus, such as the eating of roasted meat (Ex 12:8, 46) or just meat (Ex 16:3, 8, 12). Its use as bodily flesh occurs as in 'closed up the flesh' and 'flesh of my flesh' (Gen. 2:21, 23). Contrast this with Ex. 4:17 where *basar* as flesh is used in the episode of the curing of the leprous hand. There are some specific male meanings outside the 'flesh of my flesh' where basar refers specifically to the foreskin and circumcision (Gen. 17:11, 13, 14, 23-5). The inference is that when *basar* is used in reference to a person, it is the male who is being considered. Other references hint at inclusiveness (Gen. 7:16), though given the patriarchal nature of ancient Judaic society, here too, the focus is probably to men as arbiters of religious and secular life (Eze. 21:5, Joel 2:28). In all these uses, *basar* has a physical connotation (Young, *Concordance*, ad loc.; Jenni and Westermann, *Lexicon*, 283).

[10] Westermann, *Genesis*, 234. In terms of human relationships, Westermann concludes that 'man lording it over man' does not belong to the original destiny of humankind. Implicit in creation is a paradigm for equality within humankind that was not reflected in ancient Judaism but that should govern our personal relationships.

nature of man's relationship to woman is explained in the second, human centred creation narrative in which it is *adam* who is created first, specifically a male of the species, for whom a search of the animal kingdom fails to find him a suitable partner. This is hardly surprising since the message from the Priestly narrative is that all creatures are created as complementary pairs of their own kind. In Gen 2:21-3, woman is created and described in virtually all translations as *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.* However, few reflect the excitement and joy, tempered with relief that finally, a suitable companion for a joyful and fulfilling relationship has been found.[11] In the ancient Judaic culture, love was not necessarily the prime determinant in marriage that was customarily arranged by the parents for the benefit of the families or the tribe. The act of God introducing woman to man (Gen 2:18) embodies an element of a marriage being arranged.

On the argument that Gen 2:24 is aetiological, the temptation is to treat it as a 'stand alone' piece of scripture. However, by considering Gen 2:23-5 together, Pope John Paul II reveals further depths to relationship theology.[12] The first two verses describing how man is introduced to woman and their coming together in a one-flesh union have already been described. However, from Gen 2:25 comes the revelation that they were 'naked and not ashamed'. Pope John Paul II, arguing in the context of marriage, declares that the significance of this verse is that it gives humankind a purity that reflects God's vision in creation. Hence, it follows that male, female and therefore sexuality is a gift from God and should be respected as such. This leads to a Christian view of sexuality as opposed to what may be called 'instinctive sexuality' that should be found in all good heterosexual relationships.

Within Western culture, the paradigm for all relationships, whether friendship, cohabitation or marriage is that a couple are first attracted to each other.[13] This initial attraction when one person develops feelings towards a potential partner needs to be communicated, recognised and reciprocated before any sort of relationship can develop.[14] The attraction need not be solely sexual but may involve all the factors that

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[11] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* 69; Westermann, *Genesis,* 233.
[12] John Paul II, 'The Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechism on the Book of Genesis', in Rogers, *Theology and Sexuality,* 170-8.
[13] In many cultures, marriages are arranged, and that the couple will grow to love each other. Others may argue that marriage is pre-ordained: I do not wish to pursue either of these arguments here.
[14] Rowan D. Williams, 'The Body's Grace' in Rogers, *Theology and Sexuality,* 309-21.

make up appearance, intellect, common interests, and so on.[15] The combination of all these factors constitute the 'encounter point' that will feature when addressing the role of friendship in cohabitation and marriage, below.

Marriage, in the Christian tradition, may be regarded as a microcosm of creation.[16] It is argued by McCarthy that many couples marry for reasons that do not appear to conform to the strict interpretation or ideals of creation.[17] An interpretation of marriage as serving a vital social function may risk ignoring important motivations to marry such as 'fear of loneliness', failing to recognise that the natural inclination of humankind is to exist in relationship. For many couples, when they marry, the ideals for faithfulness and permanence may seem daunting prospects, particularly when they have to live their everyday lives with imperfections in themselves, their partner, and their relationship. In this sense, cohabitation, with even more imperfections, may be regarded as a more extreme example of McCarthy's argument, as couples choose to live together on a selective basis.

In summary, Gen 2:24 gives us a concise theological condensation of the rules and ordinances that should govern all good marriage-like relationships. In the context of cohabitation, a difficulty is that the scripture itself was developed within a society that recognised marriage alone as the paradigm for men and women to live together in a conjugal relationship. Jesus' teaching on Gen 2:24 was strictly to reveal the damage divorce did to society and underline the ideal for permanence in relationships. This, at least, still applies today: the (admittedly) simplistic models for married and cohabiting communities developed in Chapter 6 would become fragmented if there were not a high degree of stability in relationships as a whole.

What Gen 2:24 does do is to provide a sense of moving on towards the final relationship that is marriage. This is in accord with the normal process of pre-marital courtship and the establishment of a lasting relationship: whilst the wedding is by no means incidental, it formalises and legalises the relationship. The tradition nowadays is for the legality to be wholly established in one liturgy or civil ceremony: one is

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[15] Thomas Nagel, 'Sexual Perversion' in Rogers, *Theology and Sexuality*, 125-136.
[16] Eugene F. Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 216.
[17] David Matzko McCarthy, 'The Relationship of Bodies: Towards a Theological Hermeneutic of Same Sex Unions', *Theology and Sexuality* 8 (1998), 96-112.

either married or not married, and cannot be half-married.[18] In reality, when betrothal was celebrated through a separate liturgy, to celebrate the agreement between families, marriage was already a process. One difference is that in historical times, the aspirations of the couple may have become eclipsed by the needs or ambitions of their families whereas now, couples are much more inclined to 'do their own thing'. Proposals for the reintroduction of betrothal have much in common with older practices, but need to focus on the couple themselves. Whereas the biblical exegesis yields Christian ethics that ensure the relationship is in accord with the intentions of creation, there is scope for the legal process to be treated separately and this is considered in Chapter 8.

Although it may be tempting to bring Genesis up to date and substitute 'partner' for wife, to reflect current social trends, this would be inconsistent with scriptural meaning. However, the one word that is not often applied is 'responsibility'. I believe that Jesus would not totally condemn cohabitation, but ask that any couple entering a relationship do so with responsibility – to themselves, for each other, and for the consequences. A particular circumstance would be the start of a family. Thatcher identifies this as a major source of relationship breakdown, but through its relationship education, the church has a potential role in encouraging couples to accept and work through their changed situation rather than take the easy option and separate (in practice, this usually means the male partner leaving the situation).[19] The urge towards greater stability would lead couples to an expectation of marriage, a theme that is developed in the discussion below on the covenantal bond and the practical implications explored in Chapter 8.

Whatever are the fundamental driving forces underlying cohabitation and marriage, relationships deemed acceptable to society have historically been greatly influenced by the teaching of individual denominations. A common factor is that strict adherence to the marriage tradition has required cohabitation to be rejected. The reasons vary, reflecting the different understandings of marriage. The current attitudes towards cohabitation within the various denominations are discussed in the next section.

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[18] Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, and James D. Whitehead, *Marrying Well. Possibilities in Christian Marriage Today* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1981), 98.
[19] Thatcher, *Living Together*, 21.

7.2 Cohabitation and the Marriage Tradition

The church continues to defend the institution of marriage against what are perceived to be the 'sinfulness' of all sexual relationships outside of marriage. Whereas casual or exploitative sexual activity may be condemned for good theological reasons, there is evidence that cohabitation may also lead to a stable lifestyle, even if it does not wholly embrace the Christian ideal for permanence. Add to this the fact that most couples presenting for marriage are already living together, cohabitation is now entering the conversations of the church. The reactions of the two main marriage traditions are discussed below.

7.2.1 Cohabitation and the Sacramental Tradition

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church declares an uncompromising attitude: cohabitation is condemned together with adultery, divorce, polygamy and incest, described as 'offences against the dignity of marriage'.[20] Cohabitation, therefore, cannot be recognised by the Roman Catholic clergy as a normative relationship. A stance that declares all sex outside marriage is sinful, in theory, decisively eclipses all other possible sexual relationships and, technically, risks excommunication.

However, recent debate is starting to weaken what until recently has been an incontrovertible doctrine. Firstly, the Vatican II declaration took a major step forward in its admission of the goodness of sexual pleasure, a significant move away from the traditional stance that sex was designed solely for procreation.[21] This still begs the question as to whether sex should be contained within marriage, which would not be the case for those who regard it as a recreational activity. Premarital or extra-marital sexual relationships more often than not exclude the expectation of family, whereas procreation remains one of the fundamental goods of marriage. A strong defence of marriage is that premarital or extra-marital sexual relations more often than not exclude the expectation of family, now much easier to achieve through reliable contraception.[22] There is now a greater sensitivity to issues of sex and gender and in particular, to give women greater equality in their marriage, though the role of the

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[20] *Catechism*, 2380-2391, 2400.
[21] Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, 97.
[22] Thatcher, *Liberating Sex*, 98.

mother in the home continues to be regarded as indispensable.[23] On doctrinal grounds, the Roman Catholic Church has limited room for manoeuvre and although issues such as cohabitation may become a pastoral concern, the church can offer little other than encourage conformity to marriage.

For the Roman Catholic Church, cohabitation is a peripheral issue, one that is perceived to be a reaction against the uncertainties surrounding marital commitment.[24] Their stance is that marriage offers mutual support, companionship, and protection for a loving relationship, in all, security.[25] Couples may resist marriage, regarding it as an imperfect institution, preferring their own 'designer' relationship in an attempt to circumvent what they see as the pitfalls: conversely, the church would argue that many marital problems have their roots in premarital conduct. An encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI declared that

> marriage will not release a couple from sadness, lamentation and other defaults in their relationship, that marriage is not a cure for personal relational problems but provides a framework and opportunity to move on to a better relationship.[26]

The Roman Catholic Church is cautious not to recognise and legitimise cohabitation, largely because of its informality. Instead, it adheres to premarital chastity, monogamy, and permanence as the means of achieving stability in the family and society .[27] Nevertheless, there may be a hint in the quotation above that the church is accepting that some couples coming to marriage are already in 'marriage like' relationships.

There is some acknowledgement by Roman Catholic clergy that attitudes in contemporary society encourage couples to either live together before getting married or cohabit instead of marrying.[28] Cahill's assertion that 'couples who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce' is difficult to endorse: the statistical analysis in Chapter 2 suggests that some couples may not be capable of sustaining a lifetime

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[23] *Gaudium et Spes*, para. 52.
[24] Cahill, *Catechism,* 320.
[25] Thatcher, *Liberating Sex,* 98.
[26] Pius XI, *Casti connubii* (1930), http://papalencyclicals.net.pius_xi/P11CASTI.HTM, 34.
[27] Christopher Kaczor, 'Marital Acts Without Marital Vows: Social Justice and Premarital Sex', *Josephinium Journal of Theology* 9 (2002), 319.
[28] Lisa Sowle Cahill, 'Marriage: Developments in Catholic Theology and Ethics', *Theological Studies* 64 (2003), 89.

relationship, but the total duration of their relationship is greater if they cohabit then marry. The emphasis then is to encourage cohabiting couples towards sacramental marriage rather than to condemn them or create obstacles such as refusing the sacraments. The issue of couples agreeing to separate or live chastely prior to their wedding may be part of their approach, as would be counselling 'on the attitudes and practices that will best enable them to live out their sacramental commitment to a permanent relationship'.[29] The risk posed by its informality and easy dissolution is the creation of semi-related persons, that may be described as a population of 'disempowered people, women, and children in particular'.[30]

There are signs of movement within the Roman Catholic Church, for example, *Familiaris consortio* states

> Since God's plan for marriage and the family touches men and women in the concreteness of their daily existence in specific social and cultural situations, the Church ought to apply herself to understanding the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfil her task of serving.[31]

Although *Familiaris consortio* concentrates mainly on preserving the sanctity of marriage, there is an awareness of the problems within marriages and families that cause couples to fall short of the ideals to which the church would aspire.

There are examples of where the strict teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has been compromised. These are mainly due to cultural influences that render the strict doctrine on marriage ambivalent: if couples are not freely cohabiting, there are elements of living together as though married. One such is the practice of brides having to demonstrate their fertility by becoming pregnant before their wedding, as discussed in Chapter 2. In the mission field, situations have arisen where the conversion to Christianity has necessitated a rejection of polygamy and the unravelling of existing lifestyles. Lawler reports anecdotal evidence of missionaries having to encourage men to dismantle their households in favour of one wife: the advice of Pope Paul III in 1537 was that if a man had several wives and wished to be baptised into the faith, then he should keep his first wife only. By 1561, the ruling had

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[29] Cahill, 'Marriage', 90.
[30] This comment from the USA may not be so significant in the UK with its enhanced system of social benefits.
[31] *FC* para. 4.

changed to keep the wife willing to be baptised. Missionaries in the East Indies and Kenya have encountered similar scenarios in the twentieth century. There is a twist: when a man claims not to remember who was his first wife, invited to pick one, he usually picks the youngest! There is no indication forthcoming as to what happened to the 'spare' wives.

In the seventeenth century, under Pope Gregory XIII, the Pauline Privilege was applied to the slave trade when a man and his wife invariably became separated. The Roman Catholic Church would let the man dissolve his former marriage and remarry. Again, the fate of the separated or rejected wife is uncertain.[32]

7.2.2 Cohabitation and the Protestant Tradition

There is a major shift in attitudes towards extra-marital relationships that do not threaten the established social order between the Sacramental and Protestant traditions. Whereas the sacramental tradition adheres firmly to their doctrine of marriage to which cohabitation is mutually exclusive, there are liberal theologians within the protestant churches who consider that the quality of a relationship may take priority over its formal structure. The belief is that if a relationship is fully committed, truly faithful and loving it will naturally develop into marriage.

7.2.2.1 Cohabitation and the Anglican Tradition

The Anglican Church, though firmly bound by its Articles of Faith, encompasses a wide range of theological traditions and attitudes amongst the clergy from conservatives who align themselves with Roman Catholic theology (but may disagree on specific aspects such as, for example, papal supremacy and clerical celibacy) through to evangelicals and liberals. Cohabitation is not part of the church's teaching but within its pastoral role there is much more open debate on relationship issues, though, as indicated in Chapter 1, the Anglican church has not yet formed a consensus

[32] Michael G. Lawler, 'Committed Relationships, 'When Marriage Breaks Down: Finding a Basis for Compassion in the Tradition', delivered at Committed Relationships: Have They a Future? Marriage and its Substitutes in Contemporary Society conference, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2006 (proceedings to be published, 2008).

view. Whereas cohabitation does not normally bar a couple from marriage in church, neither does it attract particular attention from most clergy.[33]

Cohabitation has entered the discussions of the Anglican Church, at least since 1988. A General Synod Working Party, examining the church's obligation to offer marriage to couples legally entitled to marry, acknowledged that cohabitation was emerging as an issue, reflecting on the fact that for many couples, cohabitation was already their first experience of living together:-

> Cohabitation challenges the Christian understanding of fidelity and monogamy in the marital relationship. Though many young cohabiting couples would deny any charge of promiscuity or even infidelity, what cannot be in doubt is the partial nature of the commitment they appear to be prepared to make to each other.[34]

This implies that the Working Party were already attributing to cohabitation some of the ethics of marriage and that it could challenge the marriage tradition, a situation the church would need to address.[35] The Committee of Bishops of the Church of England recognised that the institution of marriage often falls short of Biblical norms, declaring that

> All relationships may be marred by selfishness, greed, and personal inadequacy. Life giving relations begin and develop only as people 'come to themselves' in sorrow and repentance for the poverty and sinfulness in their lives, and discover in God the understanding, acceptance and guidance which makes them new. [36]

Other Anglican authors develop this view, for example,

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[33] Hints directed to my son and his long-standing partner by a clergyman conducting a wedding they attended in 2005 is one factor that contributed towards their marrying in 2006.

[34] Church of England, General Synod Working Party, *An Honourable Estate: The Doctrine of Marriage According to English Law and the Obligation of the Church to Marry All Parishioners Who Are Not Divorced* (London: Church House Publishing, 1988), 52.

[35] There is a government proposal to give cohabiting couples automatic legal benefits based solely on the length of time they have lived together in particular, compensation and division of assets in the event of separation (Law Commission, Consultation 307, 'Cohabitation. The Financial Consequences of Relationship Breakdown', http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/cohabitation.htm (Accessed 31 October 2006). This report is discussed in Chapter 8.

[36] *StC*, 117.

> one must beware of a blanket assertion that married relationships are good and cohabitation relationships are sinful. Married or not, the extent to which a relationship is disobedient is the extent to which there is room for repentance and change.

and

> Cohabitation, like all relationships, change and evolve with time. Depth of commitment is something that can grow during the course of a relationship, so that a couple may eventually arrive at a permanent commitment to each other where none has existed before.[37]

In the more recent report, *Something to Celebrate*, there is some recognition of 'long-term' cohabitation as part of family life, likened to an ancient Judaic custom of 'taking' a wife', setting up home without having to go through a formal wedding ceremony. A parallel was drawn with common law marriage, though this may be misleading, as discussed in Chapter 3. One of the findings of the report is that couples are often encouraged to live together before marriage by many of the 'older' generation in order to avoid some of the difficulties encountered by those already married, though to accept such as stance is totally against church teaching.[38] Many young couples find their own reasons to cohabit, or at least, delaying their wedding, such as time to establish their careers, even the economics of getting married, accepting that they have little legal support, particularly if the relationship fails. There is a balance between conforming to traditional norms and finding the freedom to define their own 'rules of engagement'.

Three main areas of concern with cohabitation are identified in the report *Something to Celebrate*: firstly, through cohabitation, there is a change in attitude to the function of sex. A view from within the church is that 'Many Christians feel that the goodness of sexual intercourse is safeguarded by being kept within the special commitment of married love'.[39] This is saying that couples who cohabit and are in a sexual relationship are not exercising good stewardship of God's gift to humankind in Creation. However loving and committed the relationship, it is seen as flawed, lacking in discipline and a giving in to social convention. Secondly, cohabitation is regarded as a threat to the institution of marriage and family, as well as degrading society. This

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[37] Gary Jenkins, *Cohabitation: A Biblical Perspective*, Grove Ethical Studies No. 84 (Nottingham: Grove, 1993), 20.
[38] *StC*, 111-2; a similar attitude emerged from my own congregation survey (see Chapter 5).
[39] *StC*, 113.

is attributed to the absence of long-term commitments for care and mutual support that are implicit in the marriage vows. A third concern is the stability of cohabiting relationships (the statistical evidence, such as it is, addressed in Chapter 2 suggests this may be less relevant than many commentators have tended to assume). However, there is real concern that 'some cohabiting relationships are fleeting and/or exploitative' and are made even more insecure if it is 'the best that one partner can achieve in the context of the other's unwillingness to marry'.[40]

As cohabitation begins to incorporate family life, any instability risks the creation of single parent households, taking individuals further away from the Christian ideal (this will be discussed in Chapter 8).

The report *Something to Celebrate* suggests a principle to help Christians find a way forward, which is

> to hold fast to the centrality of marriage and at the same time accept that cohabitation is, for many people, a step along the way towards a fuller and more complete commitment.[41]

This approach is expanded in the 'Southwark' report *Cohabitation: A Christian Reflection*: in both reports, a key leading to a successful relationship for both Christians and non-Christians alike is identified to be commitment.[42] The general conclusion in 'Southwark' was a call for more research into cohabitation on a national basis but the specific conclusions 2 to 4 are reiterated here since they anticipated many of the attitudes expressed in the surveys (Chapters 4 an 5) as well as my discussions in Chapter 8:-

> 2. That factual information about the outcomes of cohabitation and marriage should be made widely available, especially to young people.
>
> 3. That young people in secondary schools and elsewhere should have constructive opportunities to share their opinions about sexual relationships, marriage and cohabitation, with each other and with informed adults who are sensitive to these issues.

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[40] *StC*, 114.
[41] *StC*, 117.
[42] Southwark, 108,109.

> 4. That the church should give priority to the development of Marriage Preparation Courses for couples prior to marriage, whether or not they are cohabiting.[43]

The role of marriage preparation had been questioned in *Something to Celebrate* finding that so many couples presenting for marriage are already living together, requiring an expansion to the traditional, often limited approach. One recommendation in 'Southwark' reads :-

> 10. Preparing couples for marriage, and helping them understand the depth and costliness of their commitment to each other is a crucial task for the church. We recommend that where possible marriage preparation be undertaken as a partnership between clergy and lay people, and that ecumenical co-operation in this area be explored further.[44]

The stance of the Anglican church, as represented by its doctrine and various reports is to endorse its teaching on marriage but by acknowledge the sociological changes in relationships and inviting cohabiting couples to question their motives, it is starting to encourage couples towards marriage. In this way, it adheres to its tradition, accepting that although cohabitation is widely practiced both in and outside the church, it will not go so far as to endorse it as a lifestyle equivalent to marriage.[45]

Whatever may be proposed by more liberal elements within the Anglican Church, the Lambeth Conference of 1998 declared an unequivocal stance on all extra-marital sexual relationships with the statement:

> This Conference . . . in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage.[46]

Evangelicals within Anglican tradition see all sexual relationships outside of marriage as sinful, and find that cohabitation is unacceptable within the church's authority. Edward Pratt, in a private publication, exposes the view of the evangelical tradition,

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[43] Southwark, 113.
[44] *StC*, 211.
[45] This may appear to contradict the view expressed in Chapter 5 n.222, but one needs to distinguish between the church's formal stance and the personal views of its members.
[46] Church of England, *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* (Harrisburgh, Pennsylvania: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 381.

that cohabitation seeks 'some of the chief privileges of marriage (notably sexual intercourse and mutuality) without the responsibility of marriage (lifelong commitment), reflecting a lack of discipline towards sexual relationships'.[47] This applies to both men and women. However, evangelical writers direct greater implied criticism towards women, using virginity as a marker. Typically, they will pose the question 'would God have created women in the way he has if virginity was only to be significant for part of historical time?'[48] Pratt, for example, reiterates the case that virginity was relevant in Biblical times only insofar as women were regarded as chattels to be kept unsullied. However, questions of guilt are still loaded unfairly on to women who invariably have to bear the consequences of extra-marital misconduct.

The Lambeth statement that all sexual relationships outside marriage are wrong has increasingly, been challenged by Christians of many persuasions. In all of this, the possibility of an alternative agenda driven by moves to resolve differences between the Anglican and Catholic churches cannot be entirely dismissed.

7.2.2.2 Cohabitation and the Non-Conformist Tradition

Alongside the Anglican Church, the non-conformist tradition in Britain, mainly represented by Methodists, Baptists, United Reformers and Evangelicals, embraces an equal diversity of theological tradition though all emphasise that marriage is the ideal way for a lifelong, committed relationship. There is an adherence to a covenantal tradition for marriage: a marriage is legally established through the wedding, in the knowledge that, as argued in Chapter 3, the covenant may be only partially fulfilled at this time. In common with other traditions, the exchange of vows is sufficient to confirm their commitment of intent to form a lifelong relationship and establish a valid marriage with all the responsibilities that brings.

Many non-conformists, particularly in the Methodist Church, take a more liberal approach to relationships, one that the sacramental and Anglican churches may consider irregular. They accept that couples who cohabit faithfully in a committed relationship as married share many of the lifestyle problems such as balancing family

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[47] Edward Pratt, *Living in Sin? What Does the Bible Say?* (Southsea, Hantpshire: Edward Pratt, St. Simon's Church, 6, Festing Road, Southsea, Hampshire, PO4 0NG), 5, 9.
[48] Pratt, *Living in Sin*, 7.

requirements against working constraints. What may appear as a lax attitude to sexual relationships should not be interpreted as encouragement to cohabit. The major concern is reserved for the welfare of children. Children are part of an orderly progression through parenting to grand-parenting: within marriage, this sequence may be interrupted by divorce and remarriage and in cohabitation, through the partners separating. In both marriage and cohabitation, it is not uncommon for a person to acquire their partner's family without them having had children of their own.[49] Family counsellors perceive the greater risk to be with couples living together without a current intention to marry, having children then moving on. This may lead to single parent families or, if they form new relationships, families of half-siblings or even totally unrelated siblings.[50] The risk is perceived to increase if a person is cohabiting but at the same time is exercising their privileges as a single person and therefore nor fully committing themselves to the relationship. However resilient children may be in the short-term, the concern of the church is for the longer-term stability of relationships.

The attitude of many Christians, not just those in the nonconformist churches, is reflected through the Society of Friends (Quakers) in a document from as long ago as 1963 that anticipates much of current thinking.[51] The attitude towards extra-marital relationships outside marriage rests on two fundamental issues. The first is that all sexual activity should be founded on respect for the other partner. The second is that the church is judging the fundamental qualities of right and wrong on what it describes as an external pattern of behaviour.[52] In line with assertions above that recognises growth within relationships, the document states that in a true faith:

> There can be no ultimate contradiction between what a relationship demands of us and what in practice works – works towards complete human fulfilment.[53]

This is a reiteration of humankind attempting to reach its full potential. The concern is that a strict resolution ignores many of the emotional and other factors at work: relationships entered with a degree of responsibility are much too complicated for

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[49] John Drane, and Olive M. Fleming Drane, *Family Fortunes: Faith-full Caring for Today's Families* (London: Darton Longman and Todd, 2004), 34.
[50] See n. 19.
[51] Society of Friends, *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* (London: Friends Home Services Committee. 1963).
[52] *Quaker View of Sex*, 39.
[53] *Quaker View of Sex*, 10.

such a simplistic analysis. This will become evident in the following section in which the two dimensions of love and friendship are explored.

7.3 Cohabitation, Marriage and Friendship

Discussions on cohabitation and marriage tend to focus on some notion of love, however this may be defined. Respondents to both surveys made frequent reference to love expressed through friendship as part of the key to forming a long-standing, stable relationship. This theme is expanded here to show how an embryonic theology of friendship may be used to bring cohabitation and marriage closer together within a global spectrum of personal relationships. In this section, friendship is considered as a bridge between independence on the one hand and mutual care and support on the other and should be at the core of all relationships.[54] Bucer, for example, extolled friendship, which he expressed as companionship, to be an essential part of marriage to ensure the mutual support of each of the partners, expressed through each as a 'help-meet' to the other.

It is not my purpose here to develop a fully worked out theology of friendship: that has been done elsewhere.[55] What I have done is to describe friendship as a recurrent theme running through philosophical and religious thought and show how classical and biblical values of friendship may apply to cohabitation and marriage as well as contribute an additional level of social interaction.

Friendship is common to all humankind: everyone has some capacity for making friends and all (or most) people have a need for friends, whether for the furtherance of some work or social related activity or to satisfy an emotional response. Kerney, for example, argues that it is through friendship that the true worth of another human being may be recognised.[56] In the context of marriage and marriage-like relationships, she questions whether a lack of true friendship can belie abuse, fear and coercion.[57] This is a negative approach to relationships. My interest offers a different perspective: how friendship can aid the growth of relationships. Before addressing the role of

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[54] Ignace Lepp, *The Ways of Friendship*, trans. Bernard Murchland (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 26.
[55] See, for example, Barbara Lee Kerney, 'A Theology of Friendship' (Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2007).
[56] Kerney, *Friendship*, 38.
[57] Kerney, *Friendship*, 47.See also, Anthony Giddens, Modernity and Self Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 112.

friendship in marriage, I first consider some essential properties of friendship to be derived from the classical and Biblical traditions.

7.3.1 Friendship in the Classical Tradition

Friendship has been a concern of philosophers since ancient times and one of their major contributions has been to show how friendship works at several different levels. Aristotle, for example, produced a classification of friendship on three levels that retain validity even today, albeit with the proviso that the classical understanding of friendship is invariably from the perspective of a male-dominated society.[58]

Aristotle's first level of friendship is described as utilitarian based on shared activities such as related to work.[59] One is not obliged to like the 'friend' but is required to show goodwill in exchange for mutual benefit, establishing friendship as a two-way process. There is no necessity to spend time together socially; the friendship is purely for the furtherance of career and the good of the organisation that will benefit from the constructive input from mutually beneficial relationships. Anyone involved in the social and political life of Aristotle's day, as now, would be drawn into utilitarian friendships.[60]

An intermediate level of friendship is centred on pleasure activities enjoyed together. These may include sport through to sexual relationships: friendship here is always oriented towards feelings of well-being. As with utilitarian friendship, aspirations and intentions are shared, demanding what Cicero described as 'mutual goodwill and affection' and 'no better thing has been given to man by the immortal Gods', but will endure only so far as the shared interest remains.[61] Therefore, the friendship may be tempered by one's personal needs and motives and generates a clear risk of transience at both the utilitarian and intermediate levels of friendship, imposing limitations on the quality achievable through such friendships.[62]

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[58] Kerney, *Friendship*, 2, 37. Arguing from a feminist perspective, Kearney finds that friendship is particularly attractive to feminist and lesbian theologians in terms of describing relationships and same-sex relationships in general.
[59] Aristotle, *Complete Works*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1155b19.
[60] Kerney, *Friendship*, 37.
[61] M. Tullius Cicero, *De Amicitia*, trans. W. A. Falconer (London, Heinemann, 1923), 5: 20.
[62] Kerney, *Friendship*, 37.

The third class of friendship, variously described by Aristotle as friendship of excellence, virtue or character, is based on affection or love of someone for themselves, without being qualified by external influences or parameters, and not seeking benefit or pursuing self-interest. Cicero regarded this as the highest form of friendship, guided by love, founded on trust and held together through commitment, one that allows an emotional dimension to the relationship to develop.[63] This ultimate level of friendship may take over from the intermediate level: 'love' does not necessarily imply a sexual relationship, but is used differently according to the context. Nevertheless, where there is some emotional attachment, friendship at this level is more likely to develop into a permanent relationship. Recent scholarship expresses similar ideas but directed more specifically towards Christian relationships and the very special friendship implicit in marriage.[64] This direct link between virtue and friendship reinforces the concept of friendship as a force for good.

Whatever the basis of a friendship, it must begin from an encounter and the exercise of selection or choice. This is often a result of intangible factors that enable us to make friends with one person but not another. Many friendships are established through random encounters and coincidences: whosoever we choose to be our friends is determined through our choice of workplace, social organisations we join, churches we attend and so on.[65] Any one of these situations may present several options and lead to completely different encounter opportunities.[66] Firstly, all friendships start on a basis of attraction, not necessarily sexual, but at least an anticipation of compatibility. Secondly, there is preference: most prefer to make friends with like-minded people, whether sharing skills, work or leisure related interests, and so on. The third factor is reciprocity: unless the affinity is reciprocated, a true friendship cannot be formed. Friendship is therefore a two-way interaction that hints at equality, at least insofar as the main motivation for forming the friendship is concerned: in many other respects, friendship may be a very unequal relationship.

Friendship was recognised by Jeremy Taylor as necessary for the well-being of

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[63] Cicero, *De Amicitia,* 27:100.
[64] Carmichael, 179.
[65] To this may now be added the internet as forum for meeting friends.
[66] I do not intend to enter the argument for pre-destination, except to acknowledge that some intriguing coincidences can and do arise.

society based on a two-way process of giving and forgiving, sharing and trust. This enables individuals to form special friendships and led Taylor to regard the marriage bond as 'the queen of relationships'. However, the key to true friendship, according to Taylor, is 'to love our friends more generously than ourselves'.[67] Through Christianity, argues Taylor, friendship is given new meanings that pick up ideas developed by the classicists into something that is divine, because it is beneficent: but much more because it is eternal'.[68]

Though his critics objected to his frequent recourse to Scripture, within a Christian context, it is worth reiterating his ten rules for friendship:

(i) do not require a friend to do wrong, nor do it if asked;
(ii) do not choose a person you could ever come to hate;
(iii) do not betray a friend or reveal their secrets;
(iv) do not accuse a friend or believe an accuser;
(v) give wise and loving counsel, freely, bearing no resentment if it is not followed;
(vi) avoid acting as judge between friends who both want to win;
(vii) admonish kindly and praise justly, and not feel slight when your friend is praised;
(viii) never instil fear in a friend;
(ix) esteem old friends like old wine: if he be worthy, keep the new one until he become old;
(x) Treat thy friend nobly, love to be with him, to do all the worthiness of love.[69]

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[67] Jeremy Taylor, 'A Discourse of the Nature and Offices of Friendship', in R. Herbert, and C. P. Eden (eds.) *Taylor: Whole Works,* vol. 1 (London: 1847–1854), 83.
[68] Taylor, *Works*, 98. Aristotle, *Complete Works*, 1157b5-11, draws what Carmichael calls a 'metaphysical parallel' between virtue and friendship, the potential for both being realised through shared activity: 'when friends are asleep or temporarily separated their friendship still exists as a potential force; as they get together again, the friendship activity recommences'.
[69] Taylor, *Works, 97 – 98.*

The friendship qualities apply to both partners so that neither may be regarded as superior or inferior. This is not to say that there may not be some role-distinction within a relationship, but that it is not assumed and should be open to change as the need arises. Furthermore, these rules for friendship may be applied to cohabitation as well as describing the self-sacrificial friendship required of marriage: they epitomise the, 'special friendship' demanded of any committed relationship. One measure of 'true friendship', for example, is that it continues through absence: their friendship still exists as a potential force and as they get together again, the friendship activity recommences. This continues to be a common experience within many long-standing friendships.[70]

If humankind has some intrinsic need for friendship, a potential conflict between this and self-sufficiency arises: does the self-sufficient person need friendship? Cicero considered a degree of self-sufficiency could lead to the best form of friendship arguing that a person can never be self-sufficient in all respects and friendship fills the gaps. There is a balance to be drawn is between shared activities and dependency against freedom of actions. With platonic, same-sex friendships, the shared activities, however important they are, may be only a small part of a person's life. Also, for most people, needs change over time and though loyalty may be sufficient to sustain a utilitarian friendship, an enduring friendship needs a capacity to develop much deeper, lasting bonds. This brings a further tension, the balancing of individual interest against shared activity.

In contemporary society, aspects of human activity are increasingly subject to control and regulation.[71] Kerney argues that genuine friendship flourishes outside any such regulation but is developed for its own sake. In the context of cohabitation and marriage, relationships not founded on true friendship are likely to be a product of coercion, leading to further abuses.[72]

When the classical ideas on friendship are put into a modern perspective, there is a sense in which Christian love is at the core of all enduring relationships. The love found in friendship has three aspects: firstly, it is ontological, the love founded in

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[70] Taylor, *Works*, vol. 1, 98; Aristotle, *Complete Works*, 1157b5-11.
[71] Giddens, *Modernity*, 112.
[72] Kerney, *Friendship*, 47.

sharing, whether it be 'utilitarian' or 'pleasure': because of our common natures, through friendship, we can share common goals. Secondly, love is deontological, an inspirational goodness that expresses itself in action and thirdly, love is teleological, directed to the other, seeking fulfilment within the friendship itself.[73]

Little distinction has been drawn between same-sex and heterosexual friendships. There is a clear cultural and conceptual divide: most enduring friendships are same-sex and non-sexual, whereas most heterosexual relationships are sexual, though not all lead to cohabitation and marriage. (There will always be a small number of platonic hetero-sexual friendships as there are same sex friends in a sexual relationship: these are not treated explicitly since many of the comments will apply to all forms of friendship). Cohabitation and marriage involve special friendships, alongside of which may be several equally enduring non-sexual friendships.[74] These special friendships also involve intimacy: the intimacy within a monogamous, faithful relationship is truly part of what it means to be human (though it must not be assumed, from this, that friendships described as 'platonic' may not also be sexual).[75] The difference is the motivation and commitment to monogamy and faithfulness: in effect, the deciding factor is whether the friendship is inclusive, in which case any sexual encounter may be with more than one partner and without commitment, or exclusive. This distinction will be considered further in 7.3.3, after a consideration of biblical ideas on friendship.

7.3.2 Biblical Perspectives on Friendship

Aelred of Rievaulx, reflecting on the perfect unity of Creation, declared that 'friendship originates in the nature of God', so that friendship is a natural relationship that stems directly from Creation:. The taking of woman out of man and their coming together again would not work if their relationship were not underpinned by friendship, what Aelred calls 'collateral'.[76] This means that a true friendship exhibits neither superiority nor inferiority, signalling a need for partners to be regarded as

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[73] Carmichael, *Friendship*, 199.
[74] Taylor cautioned against the destructive potential should an external friendship become more attractive than one's spouse (Taylor, *Works*, 90).
[75] Kerney, *Friendship*, 48. Macquarrie, *Guide to the Sacraments*, 218.
[76] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Opera Omnia*, eds. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), I.57.

equal in all respects.[77] This may be true for marriage-like relationships: through friendship, we express our compatibility with others, without necessarily requiring complete acceptance by another person.

Friendship features in both the Old and New Testaments, though the language used to describe it changes, and with it, the implication of what constitutes friendship. Friendship is a particular theme that runs through the wisdom books, where the values, risks and rewards of friendship are revealed.[78] This expands the concept of friendship based on need for shared activity, that may become enduring or founder depending on how the friendship is developed. From the Apocryphal writings of the Old Testament, Sirach, writing from experience, declares that

> Faithful friends are a life-saving medicine; and those who fear the Lord will find them.[79]

In this and other passages, Sirach stresses the qualities that stem from the loyalty that a good friendship brings, adding an extra dimension to the qualities of friendship discussed above.[80] However, this is only after a discussion on the deceits and deceptions that so-called friendship can reveal: 'do not trust them hastily', 'there are friends who change into enemies' and 'will not stand by you in times of trouble', finishing with some guarded advice, 'Keep away from your enemies, and be on guard

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[77] Aelred teaches separation and avoidance of friendship, between celibate men and women to obviate temptation (Carmichael, *Friendship*, Chapter 3, n. 47).

[78] Peter Atkinson, *Friendship and the Body of Christ* (London: SPCK, 2004), 10.

[79] Eccles 6:14–6.

[80] Friendship takes on a potentially different complexion when considering the friendship of Jonathan and David: the bible states that 'Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul' and Jonathan made a covenant with David because he 'loved him as his own soul' (1Sam. 18:1, 3). Two particular issues arising from the Jonathan and David story that have a bearing on Old Testament views of friendship are evident: the first is whether their friendship is purely personal, or has political overtones. Peter Mccarter argues through their use of 'covenant' for a warm relationship between the two men even though their language and discourse has political dimensions (Peter Kyle Mccarter, *1 Samuel: A New Translation With Introductory Notes and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 305). Friendship is nowadays regarded as a private relationship but in Old Testament times and until the eighteenth century, friendship, particularly that between prominent people, was held to be in the public domain. Hence it is likely the friendship between Jonathan and David could be interpreted as having some political significance (Atkinson, *Friendship*, 14). The place of covenant in marriage theology has already been highlighted, and the David-Jonathan narrative may serve to illustrate marriage as 'friendship plus covenant'.

A second issue is whether their relationship was sexual, for example, in David's lament, as they took leave of each other, 'they kissed each other and wept with each other' (1 Sam. 20:41). However, it is unlikely they would have wanted to invoke the 'condemnation of Leviticus': the argument is at best, not proven, and is not pursued here.

with your friends'.[81] Sirach recognises that 'Friends may be estranged or even become enemies, but with true friendship, reconciliation is always possible'.[82] Friendship, in his experience, has the potential for good, but risks being opportunistic and destructive.

A rare use of friend in the Old Testament is 'as a metaphor for the relationship of humanity to God', afforded to Abraham, the father of all nations, and Moses, the liberator and lawgiver, and usually associated with seeing God 'face to face'.[83] In the prophecy of Isaiah, God addresses the people, as 'Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend'.[84] This particular motif is echoed in the post-Hellenic Greek *agape* of the New Testament.

Jesus valued friendship: in John's account of events in the upper room, he quotes Jesus' saying 'I have called you friends' and that 'you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend.'[85] In the Septuagint, the Greek employed for 'friend' is *philos*. The sense in which *philos* is used is as a universal temporal friendship whether or not followers of Christ, whereas Jesus anticipates the introduction of *agape,* to describe 'the gracious, disinterested love of God'.[86] When St. Paul, in 1Cor. 13, lists the qualities that love as *agape* entails, the qualities he describes are those that would characterise an ideal marriage, honesty, kindness and compassion. There is an interesting transition between the classical Greek for friendship, *philia,* and *agape,* that expresses love within a particularly Christian context in Jn 21: 15-17.[87] When Jesus asks Peter 'Do you love me', Peter responds positively. The same word 'love' is used in all English translations, yet there is a vital distinction within this passage: whereas Jesus used

[81] Eccles 6:5–13.
[82] Eccles 22:21
[83] Atkinson, *Friendship*, 14, 17.
[84] Is 41:8; Atkinson, *Friendship*, 14.
[85] John 15:12–5; one might expect that greater love would be shown by laying down one's life for one not a friend. The sense of the passage reflects the dangerous and uncertain times in which Jesus, the disciples and the Christian community found themselves (Atkinson, *Friendship*, 3). Carmichael expands this argument using her own translation of *Summa Theologica.* Aquinas argues that we were sinners when Christ died for us but that he 'did not lay down his life for us as enemies so that we should remain enemies, but so that he could make us friends (Carmichael, *Friendship*, 109).
[86] Atkinson, *Friendship*, 2.
[87] Significantly, *philia* for friendship occurs in only two passages in the New Testament, both in the Epistle of James. In Jas 2:23, James refers to Abraham's 'friendship with God', but in the second, James castigates those who love earthly things for their own sake over God's love.

agape, Peter responded using *philein*, the Greek verb from which *philos* is derived, underlining the earthbound values held by Peter at that time.[88]

At the human level, friendship frequently diverges from the New Testament ideal of *agape*: Moltmann describes the love that Christians must show to the world as 'open friendship' where there is no requirement for the love generated within this friendship to be reciprocated.[89] It is freely offered but differs from the classical interpretation that at the human level friendship depends on reciprocity. In this respect, *agape* does not provide a wholly adequate description of the emotional bond developed through friendship: for this, I have developed my own ideas that will be explored in the next section.

7.3.3 Friendship and Relationship

Friendship for its own sake is essentially non-exclusive: one may have several friends chosen for different reasons. However, when a friendship is also sexual, then the primary relationship normally becomes exclusive: in the present context, this would include a potential for cohabitation or marriage. Such relationships are loosely described in terms of the 'love' that the partners have for each other, as described by Paul in 1 Cor 13, though 'love' may embrace many different attributes according to the attitudes of the partners and nature of the relationship. The emotional attachment that characterises enduring friendships is not easily described: for this, I have resolved it into two main components, Friendship-Commitment and Friendship-Love. These will appear in different proportions, depending upon the nature of the relationship and are described separately.

7.3.3.1 Friendship-Commitment

Everyone has their own personal space that may be modelled by a circle around them that defines their life, interests, attitudes and so on. Friendship-commitment may be defined as the overlapping of these circles, the degree of overlap describing the

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[88] George Riker Berry, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1950); Carmichael, *Friendship*, 37.
[89] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 118.

intensity of the friendship.[90] A small overlap may indicate little more than acquaintance, the greater the overlap, the closer the friendship becomes. Where a friendship is an enduring non-sexual, usually same-sex friendship (most friendships formed at an early age fall into this category), there will be a high degree of overlap. Many people have some friendships that endure a lifetime, as well as others that form and maybe decline. For heterosexual friendships that develop through courtship to eventual cohabitation or marriage, the degree of overlap will progressively increase as their level of commitment develops. It is, in effect, a measure of the commitment that arises through loyalty, shared activities, and interests.

7.3.3.2 Friendship-Love

In the New Testament, ultimate Christian love is described as *agape.* However, *agape,* is a measure of divine love that does not necessarily describe most human relationships. As a description of God's love for humankind, one that is freely offered and unconditional, it is an unequal love and directional: humankind may never fully reciprocate God's love. The reciprocity in human love between partners or spouses is a mixture of all the qualities required to sustain an enduring friendship that aspires to *agape.* A better understanding of the development of human relationships (as it applies to cohabitation and marriage) is to argue for 'friendship-love', a love that includes an amalgam of sexual and emotional attraction.

These two factors, friendship-commitment and friendship-love combine to sustain relationships. They are not entirely independent variables: sexual attraction encourages greater mutuality through friendship and *vice versa.* The important point is that within any relationship, they are not static, determined for all time, but may be expected to change as the friendship grows and matures. The initial encounter leading to cohabitation and marriage is most often driven by sexual attraction and activity and is likely to be at its most potent in the earlier phases of a relationship. Eventually, as it moderates in favour of other ways of demonstrating affection, often having fulfilled its function for procreation, to sustain an enduring relationship through the inevitable lifetime changes, the friendship component must develop and mature, generating different levels of support and mutuality.

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[90] Janet Radcliffe Richards, 'Separate Spheres', in P. Singer, *Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 204-14.

My argument is that it is a combination of Friendship-Commitment and Friendship-Love that sustains a long-term relationship, allowing human love to converge towards *agape*. When this happens, cohabitation and marriage may become indistinguishable. This finds a resonance in an argument propounded by Moltmann,

> 'When privileges based on sexual position are removed, then what is truly human emerges and remains; and that is friendship'.[91]

It is possible to illustrate how relationships transform and develop from an initial encounter, or sometimes fail, by means of Time-Lines on a Friendship Mapping Chart and this is demonstrated in the next section.

7.3.4 Friendship Mapping Chart

The following is what I have called a Friendship Mapping Chart:-

[91] Moltmann, *Church*, 116.

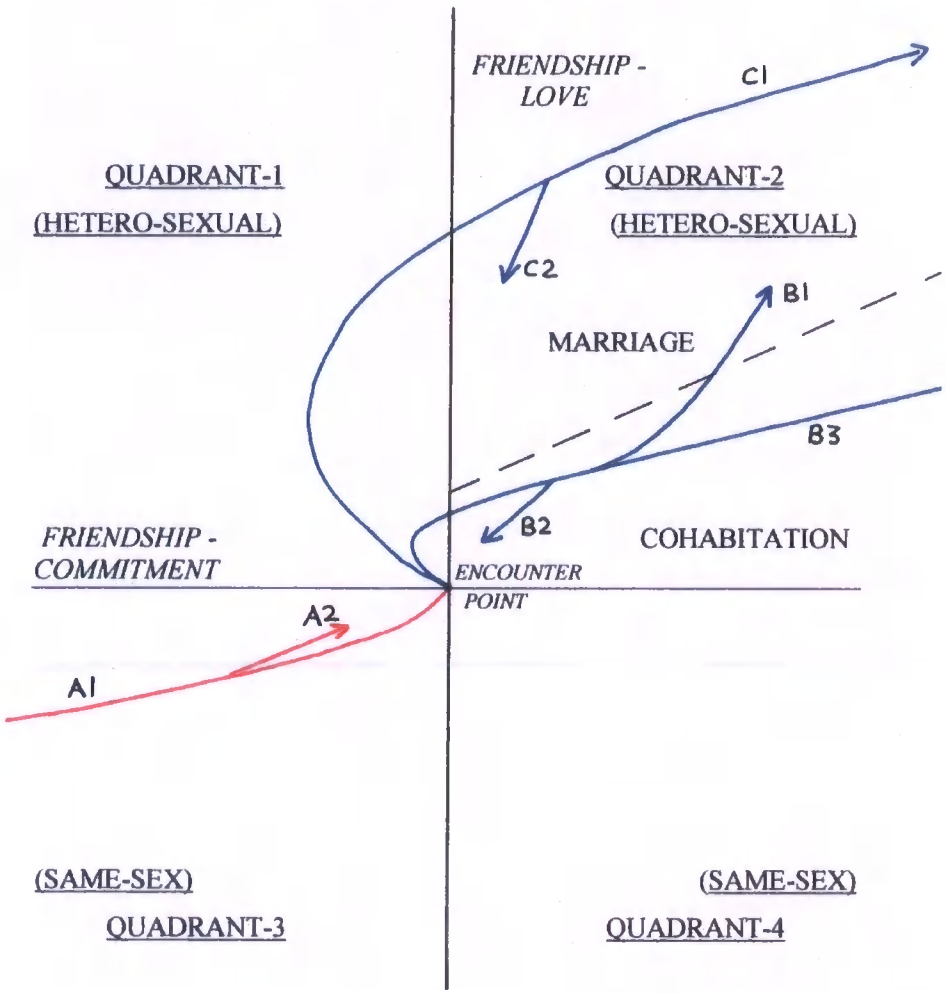

Fig 7.1 Friendship Mapping Chart Showing Typical Time-Lines

The two axes represent the time-development of a relationship from an initial 'encounter point'. The axes are not scaled: a non-linear scale would be required to cater for lifetime relationships. The vertical axis represents 'Friendship-Love', as a measure of the emotional bond that develops in a relationship: the horizontal axis represents 'Friendship-Commitment', a measure of the quality of a relationship through loyalty and mutuality. These terms may not be entirely separable in all respects, as described above, but will serve to illustrate how relationships develop.

In the Friendship Mapping Chart, all relationships start from the Encounter Point representing the initial attraction between two persons with time-lines to depict the

on-going development of the relationship.[92] Although conventional graph-type charts would suggest this represents zero love and commitment, its function here is to denote the point where these are sufficient to initiate a relationship. In that sense, it is a floating origin. Also, the start of a relationship is not necessarily an instantaneous event: the encounter point may conflate a variable period whilst awareness develops into friendship.

The axes define four quadrants that may be used to describe the development of relationships: quadrants 1 and 3 are non-sexual whereas those in quadrants 2 and 4 are sexual. A further distinction is that non-sexual friendships tend to be inclusive whereas sexual friendships are mostly exclusive. Quadrants 1 and 3 describe inclusive platonic, same-sex friendships. Quadrant 2 focuses on the one to one relationships of cohabitation and marriage and is specifically exclusive. I accept there may be some oversimplification, not representing every possible relationship, but the representation is sufficient for present purposes. Sexual same-sex relationships would appear in Quadrant-4, but are not under discussion here. (I have deliberately avoided describing these as homosexual to circumvent the inevitable implications and assumptions surrounding this term).

Each friendship or relationship follows its own time-line. Some typical time-lines are described below. In every case, the friendship or relationship develops from an initial encounter.

Time-Line A describes same-sex relationships that focus on the value of friendship-commitment as the principal driving force. The degree of commitment may vary from one friendship to another. Enduring friendships are shown by A1, driven principally by increasing commitment: those that become exhausted and terminate, shown by A2, must regenerate through new encounters.[93]

Time-Line B depicts a relationship that starts with friendship but quickly develops into cohabitation. Depending on how the level of commitment develops, the

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[92] I have adopted the concept of a time-line applied to relationships as advanced by Mary Hogan to describe the development of friendship, cohabitation, and marriage (plenary paper delivered at Committed Relationships: Have They a Future? Marriage and its Substitutes in Contemporary Society, conference, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, 2006 (proceedings to be published, 2008)).

[93] Enduring platonic heterosexual relationships are less common. Also, there is likely to be a strong divide between non-sexual and sexual same-sex relationships, based on their opposing expectations.

relationship may take any of three courses. Firstly, the relationship may move on to marriage, B1, it may end, B2, or the couple may continue to cohabit in a long-term relationship, B3. Where a relationship or marriage has ended, subsequent encounters will initiate new time-line trajectories.

Time-Line C shows a relationship that starts as friendship and moves to marriage without an intervening period of cohabitation. Within marriage, the levels of 'love' and 'commitment' may continue to develop, C1, or may decline and the marriage be terminated, C2. Each partner must then establish a new encounter-point from their next relationship may develop: in reality, this process may have already started, with two relationships coexisting for a limited time.

It cannot be assumed that the initial friendship period is non-sexual: there is every indication from the previous discussions that most premarital relationships, whether or not described as cohabitation, are sexual.

The Time-Line for any relationship is not necessarily straight: both the rate at which the intensity of the relationship, the degree of overlap of the areas of personal space as described above and the degree of commitment each is prepared to give to the other will vary between couples, and even between partners within each relationship. A person will develop several simultaneous time-lines describing their many platonic friendships, but (ideally) a single time-line for an exclusive friendship that moves on to cohabitation and/or marriage. Furthermore, the time-line does not stop once the couple have decided to cohabit or marry: their relationship will continue to develop.

Sometimes a partner may occupy two time-lines, cohabiting in an adulterous relationship or extra-marital friendship has been developing alongside their marriage.

In the global depiction of friendship, the value placed on a relationship and the degree of commitment it embraces will vary widely. Same-sex non-sexual friendships will range from casual through to 'best friend' that implies a degree of loyalty and mutual support. For committed heterosexual relationships, friendship becomes a 'special friendship': many of those interviewed through the surveys reported in Chapters 4 and 5 recognise that marriage requires this quality of special friendship, even though it

will still vary in intensity in accordance with the intentions and expectations of the couple.

At a social level, as argued in Chapter 6, cohabitation and marriage contribute differently to social cohesion, providing strong and weak links respectively. These are essentially sexual relationships, but in a similar manner, an underlying third level may be added through non-sexual friendship, discussed in the next section.

7.3.5 Friendship and Social Construct

The link between non-sexual friendship and social structure may be demonstrated by an extension the model for Friendship-Commitment described in 7.3.3.1.

The Friendship-Commitment model describes friendship as a planar relationship, with varying degrees of overlap depending on the nature and intensity of the friendship. To demonstrate how friendships interact to form networks, a better model may be to employ spheres to represent the multi-dimensional personal space. A three dimensional model can then accommodate several simultaneous friendships that orient in different directions according to their shared ideas and attitudes. This recognises the reality the friendships one has developed will involve friends who have other friendships: these I describe as related friendships. In this way, related friendship networks may be established. A feature of these networks is the potential for meeting like-minded persons from elsewhere in the mesh that enables new links or friendships to be established with the potential for long-lasting hetero-sexual partnerships leading to cohabitation or marriage.

Links formed through non-sexual friendships extend the social-structural models developed in Chapter 6, adding a new tier links created through Friendship-Commitment. Because of the potentially transient nature of friendship producing a changing matrix of friendships, these links will have a higher 'noise' level than either cohabitation or marriage. Thus, in terms of social cohesion, informal friendship links are regarded as very weak, though always with the potential for creating long-range enduring friendships sufficient to have an affect on the functioning of society. Thus the social construct evolved in Chapter 6 is now extended to three tiers, describing the

contribution to social structure of the three main groups of relationship described as friendship, cohabitation and marriage.[94]

7.4 Concluding Remarks

There are two main outcomes from this chapter. Firstly, although it is difficult to consider cohabitation in a truly theological context, it may assume many qualities of a theological nature. In particular, cohabitation may be marriage-like where it reflects the Christian ethics of marriage, expounded in Chapter 3. There is a sense in which Augustine's 'goods of marriage' may serve cohabitation also. What this is saying is that many couples are cohabiting with the integrity and sense of responsibility that characterises marriage. Couples see their relationships as both stable and permanent. It is for these reasons that many clergy and congregation members are prepared to respect couples for whom cohabitation is their chosen lifestyle, though without the confirmatory vows, may continue to treat them with a degree of caution. This attitude of caution is found in the growing number of documents, reports, and discussions from the various denominations, where there is considerable uncertainty on how to treat relationships that range from short-term to ones that are as highly committed and loving as any marriage.

A second outcome is my discussion on friendship viewed as a gift to humankind through Creation that unites cohabitation and marriage into a whole spectrum of relationships. I have not attempted to develop a full theology of friendship: that has been done elsewhere. What I have done is to use my own ideas to show how an extension of Biblical and classical concepts may be used to resolve the 'love' in cohabitation and marriage into two components, Friendship-Commitment and Friendship-Love. Ways in which relationships develop have been shown by means of a 'Friendship Mapping Diagram': whether cohabitation, marriage, or solely friendship, the progress of a relationship is mapped by means of a time-line. My argument is that an underlying level of friendship can give strength to a relationship and the power to endure and sustain it in the long term.

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[94] I am aware that there has been no mention of single persons. If non-celibate, then they may contribute through cohabitation or short-term friendships. If celibate, then they will contribute to the social construct model through enduring friendships.

The surveys reported in Chapters 4 and 5 confirmed marriage to be the primary relationship and this is endorsed by the discussions presented here. The desire within clergy and congregations, at least in the Harrogate area, is to find ways of helping couples find stability in their relationships, ultimately moving forward towards marriage. In the next chapter, I discuss how this may be achieved, firstly through better education on the Christian attitudes to marriage and secondly, the introduction of a new lifestyle status of Committed Relationship in parallel with the re-establishment of betrothal. This should encourage churches, with the help of government, to refocus their attitudes towards cohabitation through measures to create greater stability in all heterosexual relationships, contributing to the stability of society.

Chapter 8

Cohabitation, Marriage and the Pastoral Practice of the Church

Through its development of a strong tradition for marriage, the church has always been constrained to reject any relationship outside of marriage that is sexual in nature. Cohabitation is one such relationship, leaving the church with a limited number of options. One is to ignore it completely, pretend it does not happen and adhere to a strictly orthodox interpretation of Biblical teaching on marriage. Alternatively, it may regard cohabitation as a wholly secular lifestyle and of no legitimate concern, to the extent of ignoring pastoral issues surrounding cohabiting couples, even within their congregations. A third approach is to recognise that cohabitation in contemporary society may embody marriage-like virtues and help transform it to serve as a preparation for marriage. All three attitudes were found in the clergy and congregation surveys: respondents from the sacramental and evangelical traditions tended to regard cohabitation as an inappropriate lifestyle to be discouraged, and that all sexual relationships should be kept within marriage.[1] More liberally minded church members showed a greater tolerance of cohabitation, accepting that society has created an environment that encourages couples to live together. However, many couples find that they still do not have the confidence in the shorter term to embark on marriage, particularly when economic, social, and work-related factors make a lifetime commitment seem unrealistic. This can result in growing uncertainties within their relationship, and encourage short-term attitudes that run counter to the ethics of marriage. The social implications are that partners are more likely to have had several marriage-like relationships before deciding to marry (if, indeed, they get that far). Having had the experience of previous relationships that have broken-up, they may view marriage itself as less than permanent and be ever ready to resort to divorce if their own marriage turns out to be less than perfect. The church cannot prevent couples from cohabiting, but it may be more effective in addressing the problems

[1] Even here, there are indications that the views of traditionalists are being challenged and questioned through the behaviour of their children who hold views at odds with their parents' beliefs. A Non-Conformist evangelical minister confided through the survey that his daughter, who had decided to form a committed relationship with her boyfriend but without a firm intention to marry, sought the permission of her father before living together, lest her action should compromise his authority within the Church. The fact the couple had a commitment to marry helped sway the argument, but there was inevitably some discomfort felt when the couple visited and expected to share the same bed.

faced by cohabiting couples by demonstrating the value of forming stable relationships that will naturally move on to marriage.

8.1 Cohabitation in Relation to Marriage

Though cohabitation is an intrinsic part of marriage, the converse is not necessarily true. Nevertheless, theologically, there is a shared commonality of lifestyle attributes and ethics. At the same time, cohabitation has attracted some distinctive lifestyle features: partners tend to retain separate names and identities, separate bank accounts, and separate interests. This promotes an overlapping rather than fully integrated lifestyle, described by a model of intersecting circles.[2] It has been argued in Chapter 7 that cohabitation and marriage are linked through a universal factor, friendship. The friendship mapping chart (see 7.3.3.1) shows how with love and commitment, a relationship may grow. However, there is a degree of idealism here and whereas marriage may not always be a perfectly symmetrical relationship, there is no reason to suppose that cohabitation is any better: in terms of expectations it is likely to be less so.

The surveys revealed some reluctance by clergy and church members to accept short-term relationships, associating them with sexual adventure and alien to the Christian tradition of respect for marriage and family life. However, there is a growing realisation that cohabitation as a medium- or long-term relationship may embody Christian attitudes and aspire to permanence, comparable to marriage. The discussions with clergy and congregations inevitably focussed on marital breakdown and divorce, and the consequences for the church family. This belies their concerns to find ways of creating enduring relationships, honouring one's marital vows.

Although respect for cohabitation may be increasing, this does not always extend to approval, and its role in developing relationships is not always fully accepted. An example is the divergence of opinion on whether in the context of marriage breakdown, pre-marital cohabitation enables a couple to know each other better. The argument is that unacceptable traits may be suppressed, described as the 'good behaviour' syndrome. My own reply to this would be that longer rather than shorter term cohabitation would be more likely to reveal true character: this is, in a sense, the

[2] See 7.3.3.1.

argument of Erasmus on the subject of long betrothals (see 3.3.2). There is also some suspicion that the economic argument is not necessarily fully justified, but that couples will now live together because there is no social or cultural constraint to dictate otherwise.[3]

With a more general readiness to accept pre-marital cohabitation, there is a body of opinion in the church, from both clergy and congregations, that the church can no longer regard the wedding as the threshold for living together. What is less clear is how this can be achieved without compromising the marriage tradition: a challenge for the church is to encourage marriage by raising the expectations of cohabitation. This would be achieved through the teaching of a greater understanding of the ethics of marriage, the nature and responsibilities of commitment and the role of a stable relationship in family and community life. The impact of cohabitation on the church is discussed below in terms of its pastoral role, leading to ways forward that will contribute towards creating greater stability in all relationships that is anticipated to contribute to the well being of society.[4]

Both cohabitation and marriage centre round an emotional bond that works only if it is accompanied by intents for faithfulness and stability and/or permanence. In marriage, these intents are declared explicitly through the vows and promises, but in contemporary society, there is no comparable affirmation of commitment for

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[3] Economic arguments forever intrude into a thesis of this nature that considers social as well as theological consequences for cohabitation, though these are outside its main aims. Suffice to say that when I married in the 1960s, the married person's tax allowance was a bonus, if not an incentive to marry (the tax rebate was given for the whole tax year in which a couple married which was advantageous to couples marrying close to the end of the tax year). This was at a time when women were still not fully accepted in the workplace in the sense that following childbirth, they were often expected to remain at home to care for the family, as did the previous generation. As child-care became more widely available (though probably more so amongst the 'middle class'), so were women able to pursue their careers. The marriage allowance, given to the husband, was phased out in favour of separate personal allowances. However, the potential for recognising the worth of marriage as a force for good in society, creating better and more stable families remains a topic for discussion.

A second economic incentive came from some larger employers who would 'reward' employees by moving their salary incremental date forward to the date of their wedding, or even giving a pay-rise on becoming married. This means of stimulating greater stability within a workforce has also disappeared in a climate of shorter-term relationships as well as more frequent moving from one employer to another and a lessening of employer-employee loyalties.

[4] Clergy and congregations in the surveys affirmed that marriage offers the potential for greater emotional security through the way it establishes links that help bind society, confirm a person's genealogy, and give them a sense of belonging to something that is much bigger than their own relationship. Interviewees who had married but cohabited first, initially without an intention to marry, have found that the 'piece of paper' has greatly strengthened their relationship. This is part of what clergy mean when they say that couples should not be come complacent and satisfied with what they have got when they could move on to something much better.

cohabitation. Although a cohabiting couple may have their own ways of confirming their intentions, these carry no significance beyond their own self-imposed boundaries. Both marriage and cohabitation may embrace similar ethics: one of the fundamental differences between them, as argued in Chapter 3, is that marriage establishes kinship in a way that cohabitation does not and with it, implications for care and responsibility. This alone may separate marriage from cohabitation: kinship establishes genealogies that define an individual's place in humankind. In this respect, cohabitation can never achieve the same status as marriage and as a relationship, must remain incomplete. However, there is an acknowledgement no relationship, whether cohabitation or marriage guarantees perfection.

The surveys revealed that few amongst the clergy and congregations are prepared to reject cohabitation outright so long as it has the potential to lead to marriage and a couple have a very clear sense of moving their relationship on to something better. Within the church community as a whole, there is caution over the belief that cohabitation is neither a good preparation for marriage nor, also as a lifestyle in its own right, whether it provides adequate security for family life. Several clergy expressed views that too many couples cohabit on a relatively superficial basis without considering the long-term factors such as family, finance, health, career aspects and so on, all of which influence the stability of a relationship.

Many couples live together without a current intention to marry. This may be part of a process of getting to know each other that every couple needs before that decision can be made and brings into question the high incidence of short-lived marriages and whether this may be taken as evidence that cohabitation has not enabled the partners to know each other well enough. One perception is that the 'drift-in' nature of cohabitation leads to a corresponding drift-in approach to marriage and a poor understanding of what marriage means. A concern voiced through my surveys was that although a decision to marry may not be presently uppermost in the minds of a couple at the outset of cohabitation, they should not be living together without a degree of commitment to each other (and it is probably rare for any couple to cohabit without any commitment). Even so, there remains the difficulty of recognising what is potentially a long-term relationship as opposed to one of several short-term serial relationships.

There is a sense in which the role of the wedding is being redefined; many couples have already signed up to the moral imperatives of marriage through their living together and the wedding has become the final legal, social and sometimes religious seal on their relationship. Thus, the function of the wedding is to provide a confirmation of their relationship, bringing it into the public domain. This accords with the covenantal mentality of marriage, discussed in Chapter 3, where it was argued that a full covenantal relationship would develop as the relationship matured and not necessarily be fully in place at any specific time. The development of a full covenantal relationship that approaches the ideals of the sacramental marriage is assumed to be in the context of marriage, but with the logistics of arranging weddings inviting considerable delays, this progression is already implicit in cohabitation.

Circumstances may arise where one partner, for their own reasons, may refuse to marry, creating an asymmetric relationship such as was discussed in Chapter 1. The attitude 'no point in getting married just for the sake of it' or 'it is only a piece of paper' reveals a lack of understanding of what marriage is about, and this is an area where the church can fulfil an educational role. Another rationale, identified in Chapter 4, was that some partners might be unwilling to marry because of scars from a previous relationship that have not had time to heal: the new relationship may be viewed as part of that healing process. The immediate pastoral need is to help individuals through their problems in the hope they will eventually resolve past difficulties and find the confidence to remarry.

The argument revolves around commitment, something that is not necessarily uppermost in our culture: one clergy respondent argued that *it is something that people learn, often after, maybe long after their wedding.*[5] The suspicion is that a reluctance to make long-term, binding commitments of any sort is symptomatic of similar attitudes found in other aspects of church and many other aspects of life.

8.1.1 Cohabitation: Privatisation of Marriage

The view that cohabitation represents the privatisation of marriage has been endorsed by several respondents: a typical response, *when you say make a public commitment to your partner, it's legally binding. You are saying I can only be married to this*

[5] C003: Roman Catholic.

person, and you are here as my witness. Living together is privatising marriage.[6] This privatisation comes through cohabitation being isolated from the community in two ways. Firstly, by not going through some sort of formal public marriage ceremony, the relationship is not admitted to the public domain. Secondly, there is a personal element in that the relationship may remain secret from family and friends. This means there may be no commitment to anyone beyond the partners themselves.[7]

The attitude of many couples is to retain an ever-greater measure of individual independence. This stems in part from the social pressure for self-fulfilment through the achievement of one's maximum potential: *people have the freedom to choose what they want to do, when they want to do it, how they want to do it. There has never been a time when people have had so much freedom to choose how they spend their day, what they do with their time, and what profession to take up. Whilst you have all this fantasy of freedom, the heart of the matter, what am I actually called to do in life, what does God want me to do, easily gets submerged.*[8]

If cohabitation were to become the dominant lifestyle, a substantially unconnected society could arise.[9] In both cohabitation and marriage, the strongest driving force is the desire to form a conjugal relationship; even if cohabitation imposes no further constraints other than a desire to live together, it continues to share some of the benefits of marriage but without a need to conform to traditional social norms. The factors determining choice of partner, age, common interests, and so on invoke further comparability with marriage, but after that, accepted norms of legitimacy may be ignored. In the extreme, the sexual community could become constituted entirely through private relationships.[10] Relationships become isolated and not part of any formal social network. Couples cohabiting outside of marriage may perceive their relationship as right and proper, and of no concern of either church or society. In an attempt to resolve this divergence in the concept of commitment, some were prompted to treat cohabitation as a 'trial marriage'. As a concept, this became popular some twenty years ago, at the time when the church was starting to come to terms with

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[6] C028: ONC/Evangelical.
[7] This in itself may be reflecting a much wider attitude within a society that *has become more individualistic. This shows through cohabitation and marriage: marriage is more than just a relationship between the two people* (C014: Anglican/Mainstream).
[8] C003: Roman Catholic.
[9] Some of the social consequences of cohabitation have been discussed in 6.5.
[10] See, for example, Thielicke, *Sex*, 33-5. See also Chapter 7 n. 33.

cohabitation and theologians and sociologists were trying to explain the changing social order. As a descriptive term, 'trial marriage' has largely fallen out of use when so many cohabiting couples already regard themselves as 'married', in a quasi-permanent but nevertheless exclusive, loving relationship.

Jesus himself was less concerned with institutional matters than with personal conduct, and the duty of the church is to extend his message of love towards those who fall short of the ideals.[11] With few exceptions, there is a call is for better relationship education (clergy frequently cite a lack of resources for not being more involved). The church has a right to uphold moral values and proclaim ideal of marriage but at same time, needs to recognise and respect individuals who are sincere in their choice to live a differently structured lifestyle where that embodies a loving, lasting relationship. As cohabitation has developed and become accepted, it may now be more appropriate to regard cohabitation and marriage as parallel relationships, though always with a potential for convergence. Church family members may be prepared to respect couples making a conscious decision not to marry, but where they are content to cohabit long-term, they need to consider why they think their relationship is sufficiently strong that they do not need the support that marriage may bring. There may be circumstances when a committed relationship can only be achieved through cohabitation. More than one respondent suggested that the reluctance by some people to make a binding commitment reflects psychological as well as emotional problems, that they are more likely to sustain all that Christian marriage is about if they have not tied themselves by making a binding commitment through getting married. A partner may be incapable of holding down a marriage but is perfectly happy so long as he or she is not hemmed in. If the relationship embodies the spirit of what is Christian marriage, the pastoral response from the clergy respondents is that it would be better not to force the issue. Nevertheless, clergy and congregation respondents were clear that the church must continue to hold to ideal of life-long monogamous marriage: the concern was how to achieve a good marriage and accommodate the changes that will occur over time.[12] What this is saying is that there should be ways into marriage that are always open, giving encouragement to all cohabiting couples to understand the implications and Christian interpretation of

[11] *StC*, 115.
[12] See also Forster, *Cohabitation*, 96.

commitment and create a better relationship (this striving for a better relationships applies equally to marriage).

8.2 Marriage and Relationship Education

The church has a traditional role in the education of society on moral and ethical behaviour as opposed to legal matters yet it is frequently perceived by congregations to be falling short, firstly from the pulpit and secondly through good and effective marriage preparation. The church needs to find new ways of making its education on relationships and preparation for marriage more accessible: *people have a right to say 'Whom should I listen to?' You try to enable people to understand relationships through a Christian view of life: that does not mean that relationships won't have problems or struggle at times, but fundamentally, if they are built on the two pillars of grace and truth, their chance of survival will be better.*[13] Many couples now value their lifestyle over and above traditional social and theological imperatives, yet it is clear from the experience of those involved in marriage preparation that they are entering potentially long-term relationships without having considered the implications and consequences.

The surveys identified a number of concerns. Firstly, there is a need to engage with those couples who have effectively privatised their relationship, as discussed above. Secondly, when cohabitation is so often the start of a relationship, whether or not it develops into marriage, there is a need to make marriage preparation and relationship education more effective. Thirdly, with declining church attendance plus the trend towards weddings held in secular locations that offer a desirable settings and facilities, marriage preparation is reaching out to ever fewer couples. Part of the church's pastoral role should be better relationship education for all couples cohabiting or getting married. One particular deficiency is a poor appreciation of the value of friendship in the long-term sustenance of a relationship. The rationale is to counter short-term attitudes, premature marriage failure, and failure of other marriage-like relationships through a greater appreciation of the longer-term implications.

[13] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.

8.2.1 Marriage Preparation

Marriage preparation has been one of the traditional functions of clergy, to ensure that those marrying in church understand something of the nature of their commitment as well as to enable them to confirm the legitimacy of their relationship within civil and canon law. The surveys showed that in practice, marriage preparation is extremely variable, ranging from intensive questionnaires and group sessions down to a brief interview with a clergyman. Reasons identified for the shortcomings are usually a lack of resources, where clergy take very few weddings because their church is not a particularly attractive venue. Also, marriage preparation is often at a late stage in the wedding arrangements when a huge financial commitment has already been made and there would be a considerable loss of face involved in backing down.

The tendency is for each church to develop its own marriage preparation programme: *one of the things we could look at the possibility of a (Methodist) Circuit marriage preparation programme. Some churches already have a very well worked up programmes (and marriage enrichment for those already married).*[14] Collaborative 'in-house' initiatives are most likely to be denominational but a more wide-ranging approach could be taken: *in my previous church, we had a training process run by a trained counsellor where she ran a series of courses/meetings and in those sessions we had two or three couples from the church already married.*[15] These approaches are all oriented towards couples marrying in church. However, a number of initiatives are reviewed, all of which are capable of expansion and extension to couples cohabiting, directed towards strengthening of all relationships.

The first comes from the Methodist churches in Caversham. A rigorous approach to marriage preparation was adopted through independently run courses as a cooperative venture with RELATE-Reading in the late 1990s.[16] The need arose because of insufficient resources to enable each Methodist church to offer its own marriage preparation. Since there were already established links with RELATE, this was an obvious vehicle with which to set up a joint venture. Half-day sessions were led by a

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[14] C027: Methodist/Liberal-Radical. An incidental benefit could be to take away the pressure from clergy who feel disinclined to conduct weddings for those who are known to have cohabited

[15] C017: Methodist/Evangelical.

[16] Information supplied by Revd Rosemary Fletcher (rosieandjim@wow.lk) and Revd. Peter J. Cole (pjcole2@tiscali.co.uk).

RELATE counsellor: the cost was included in the marriage fee. Being a secular organisation, RELATE concentrated on the practicalities of marriage with clergy attending to the spiritual side of marriage. One minister identified communication as being one of the key factors that underpin many of the problems and pitfalls in marriage. He initiated an additional course in conjunction with RELATE-Reading under the general invitation 'Are you planning for a wedding or a marriage? If you are planning for a marriage this is a session for you'.[17]

It was a condition that anyone wishing to marry in a Methodist church in the Caversham Circuit to have completed one of their marriage courses.[18] Although set up originally for the Methodist churches, it was used by other denominations through Churches Together. The churches in Caversham in association with RELATE-Reading also inaugurated a follow-up session 'Looking Back and Looking Forward', described as an opportunity to consider experiences of the first year of marriage and make plans for the future.[19]

It must not be assumed that such initiatives are always successful: one minister reports that *RELATE were extremely critical of clergy. They more or less blamed us for allowing people to just drift into the sparkle of marriage as if the glory of the day is all that matters, failing to point out the nature of the seriousness of marriage and depth of the commitment.*[20] This remark illustrates a major difficulty with all marriage preparation that the couple are focussed on the 'big day' and may not have full concern for the consequences of their marrying.

The second example is a similar but specifically Anglican initiative by Marriage Encounter, centred in Orpington, Kent, that has spawned the course 'Anglican Engaged Encounter' as part of the broader initiative 'Anglican Marriage Encounter'.[21] These are weekend courses, with similar objectives to 'Caversham', involving teams of married couples and clergy. This course was set up as an alternative to traditional marriage preparation, to give couples a chance to reflect on their relationship.

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[17] Press notice, RELATE, Reading Marriage Guidance, August 1997.
[18] Revd Rosemary Fletcher, *General advice to couples wanting to get married in one of the Methodist Churches in Caversham* (December 1997) (rosieandjim@wow.lk).
[19] Churches Together in Caversham, February 1998.
[20] C025: Methodist/Liberal-Mainstream.
[21] Anglican Marriage Encounter, http://www.marriageencounter.freeserve.co.uk (Accessed 20 May 2006).

The third initiative to be highlighted is Family Matters York that offers courses under the broad headings 'Marriage/ Relationships, Money Matters and Parenting'.[22] As with the Relate courses, this has been developed through the inspiration of a local minister, conscious that many candidates coming to him for remarriage were divorcees who had entered their first marriages without due regard to the implications. He quotes that *in York, we get married couples to meet with those planning to get married as part of marriage preparation. There is pre-marital counselling to try to avoid some of the pitfalls that have happened when people have got married without even knowing each other.*[23] Their marriage preparation course is based on FOCCUS, but their website claims that having been going for more than three years, *all the couples who did FOCCUS inventory are still married and going from strength to strength in their relationships.*[24] A strong reaction from congregations is that the church should do more to reach out and offer marriage preparation to non-church-going couples preparing for marriage in civil ceremonies.

Courses at Family Matters York are open to couples who perceive cohabitation to be their chosen lifestyle. There is a notional threshold of five years, beyond which couples are assumed to be living together in long-term relationships, whereas couples living together for less than this period are more likely to be engaged or intending to marry. Uniquely, Family Matters York also sponsors courses for married couples wanting to strengthen their relationship. This recognises the impact on a marriage of starting a family, the children leaving home, elderly relative care and all the other changes that require couples to adjust to new situations. However, as with many such initiatives, the scheme is hampered through lack of resources: *we desperately need mature, Christian couples to be available.*[25]

A factor emanating directly from cohabitation that clergy invariably fail to consider, the effect of one or both partners having been in one or more previous marriage-like relationships that have ended. This presents a situation akin to a partner being

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[22] Family Matters York, http://www.familymattersyork.org.uk (Accessed 15 April 2006).
[23] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.
[24] An alternative to the FOCCUS questionnaire is a four-part survey 'His and Hers Marriage Preparation' to be completed by each of the partners separately. It starts with straightforward lifestyle questions, working through to in depth analysis of their relationship. The questionnaire is Christian based and designed to support marriage preparation Redemptorist Publications, http://www.redempt.org (Accessed 21 May 2006).
[25] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.

divorced but whereas divorce is in the public domain, and can be legitimately discussed and challenged if necessary, cohabitation is not and relies on whatever facts are revealed by the persons involved or through hearsay. The ending of a cohabiting relationship may be every bit as traumatic as divorce, particularly if there have been, for example, disputes over property or with child-care rights that are not fully protected. Where there is no necessity to reveal details of previous cohabiting relationships, there can be no guarantee that they did not involve infidelity, violence, or abuse. Some clergy who conduct group discussions with prospective marriage candidates find that the issue of previous relationships do sometimes emerge. However, the significance of previous cohabiting relationships has largely been ignored by clergy in their marriage preparation yet in many ways, in many ways is much more relevant than the issue of divorce.[26]

Some of the comments above signal a need to discuss marital issues in a broader forum, outside formal marriage preparation and away from the immediacy of the wedding. One way of doing this would be for more general discussions on marriage during National Marriage Week, another is for clergy to be available on 'neutral ground such as bridal exhibitions to discuss and encourage church marriage.

8.2.2 Marriage Preparation and National Marriage Week

An avenue that many churches neglect is to capitalise on National Marriage Week: often, congregations are only vaguely aware of its existence and objectives as it rarely features in church calendars. Very few preachers take National Marriage Week as an opportunity to explore personal relationships, though as always, there are exceptions. In 2005, John Packer drew parallels between Lent and marriage in terms of commitment in his sermon during National Marriage Week in 2006, going on to say: *a marriage involves commitment in a way which cohabitation does not. Those who are married after a period of cohabitation often find that the pressures of married life are quite different from those of living together. Cohabitation is therefore a poor preparation for marriage although often entered for good and moral reasons. It is*

[26] This argument was included in an informal paper, 'Cohabitation and Marriage', which I delivered to a Harrogate Methodist Circuit 'Training Day' on Marriage, (Norwood Chapel, 15 October 2003). Their response showed this was an aspect of marriage preparation not usually considered.

also true that many marriages which follow cohabitation do flourish. Nevertheless, the basis of the relationship is quite different.[27]

An extension to this is to hold services of renewal for already married couples and National Marriage Week affords a neutral opportunity for this to happen. An example comes from a non-conformist minister in response to calls from Stewards in his church wanting a service affirming marriage today: *people believe in marriage but they expect more of it, therefore they are not going to tolerate a marriage that is only half a marriage. So we had a 'Marriage Renewal' service: I wanted couples to stand up and repeat their promises, in front of all those present.* The service attracted criticism in that it risked isolating the unmarried, separated, divorcees and widows, but the minister persevered. In the event, it was seen as *an opportunity to share together in that unique wholeness. One widow was gave thanks for 40yrs marriage. If you want to affirm marriage you find problems not from the people who don't believe in marriage, but from those you thought would.*[28]

8.2.3 Marriage Education Through Public Events

Bridal and wedding fairs have become regular events that attract large numbers of people preparing for their wedding. This presents an opportunity for clergy to present the case for church marriage by being available to talk through the church's understanding of marriage. Whilst it may not be appropriate to give individual counselling to couples, that remains the function of local clergy at individual churches, the opportunity is there to expand on the meaning of marriage beyond the legal requirements from the perspective of the Christian church through a pastoral approach.

Some success has been reported by a number of clergy, for example, Ven. John Oliver, former Archdeacon of Leeds, supported such ventures saying *in many ways we are the wedding experts but we do not market our expertise well. We need to be more aggressive presenting our product and making it very clear that what we offer is more than a good backdrop for the photographs. We are privileged in being so heavily involved with so many people at this very important part of their life and we*

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[27] John R. Packer, letter to author, 21 February 2005.
[28] C019: Methodist/Liberal.

must not fail those who come to us to seek the Blessing of God for their future life together.[29] This is an example of the church being much more proactive in its approach to marriage instead of its traditional passive attitude taken by so many clergy, waiting for the call instead of generating a demand.

A similar initiative by Revd. Andrew Body at a UK Wedding Show in Manchester, January 2005 also created considerable interest by suggesting that couples should undergo *'a free 'MOT' to work out whether they are sexually, financially and emotionally compatible before they walk up the aisle'*.[30] This approach was clearly considered sufficiently unusual to warrant a full-page article in a national newspaper (if not wholly accurate in its reporting) and generated thirty-two radio and Television interviews.[31] Part of the strength of this approach was his accompanying booklet discussing all aspects of marriage from commitment to planning the wedding itself.[32] Though not a questionnaire as such, each chapter presents several scenarios accompanied by has a series of discussion points under the global heading 'Things to Talk About and Share'. For example, in the chapter on Communication, two of the questions posed are firstly, *Can you agree to disagree sometimes*? *Can you always read the unspoken messages from each other that come from body language and facial expressions*? Under Families, the question is posed, *How involved do you feel you should be with problems in the families you come from*? This format has major advantages over a formal questionnaire in that it gives a lead into each of the question areas through the text and that it can be approached in piecemeal fashion, allowing participants to approach it in its entirety or as appropriate to their circumstances, and meets some of the criticism voiced in the surveys that many couples enter marriage without having considered such matters. The FOCCUS questionnaire is often too intensive and off-putting for many couples but the booklet written by Body, which takes its inspiration from FOCCUS, takes a gentler, if no less searching approach to issues that good marriage preparation seeks to explore.

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[29] Bishop of Ripon Newsletter, March 2004.
[30] The Times, January 31 2005, 5.
[31] Andrew Body, letter to author, 14 February 2005.
[32] Andrew Body, *Growing Together – A Guide for Couples Getting Married* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

Away from the stereotyped church marriage scenarios, the text highlights some apparently bizarre weddings (all based on actual weddings taken by Body) such as a Hells Angel wedding with the bride wearing a short white veil over her helmet plus a minder with a pick-axe handle up his sleeve and departure with Police escort! Nevertheless, he praises the couple for standing up for their convictions and insisting on a church wedding.

8.2.4 Pastoral Outreach and Civil Marriage

The Marriage Preparation programmes discussed above are focussed largely within the envelope of the church community, in the context of couples wanting to get married in church. However, most weddings now take place in Registry Offices or other venues licensed for Civil Weddings, so that a majority of couples receive no marriage preparation at all.[33] If there is a concern to create more stability in marriage and reduce the divorce rate, then there is the potential here for a major pastoral outreach initiative. There is material already to hand, particularly the book by Body highlighted above as well as courses established within RELATE to form an embryonic package for all couples getting married.

The initiatives introduced above, whilst being open to couples intending to marry, or already married, tend to offer much less to cohabiting couples, whether they are intending to marry or have consciously rejected marriage but maybe don't realise the full implications of their decision. There are other couples who are not currently cohabiting but nevertheless feel under pressure to start 'living together', whether it be for sex, to ease financial burdens, or under an illusion that they are undertaking some form of 'trial marriage'. This opens up a whole new opportunity to explain the ethics and ideals of relationships. Even without the benefit of a 'Business Plan', such a venture would be a huge undertaking and would almost certainly demand government support if not a dedicated body to organise it.

Two possible schemes are suggested. One would be to prepare an information pack based around an expanded form of Body's booklet for all secondary school leavers. The timing may be refined: some teenagers will already be sexually experienced, but on the evidence that only a small number of girls become pregnant, however regrettable the fact may be to some sociologists, a majority would be receptive to a balanced theological and sociological approach. The aim should be to prompt couples to question the basis of their relationship and whether it will achieve stability.

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[33] Marriage rates in the UK with and without a religious ceremony are discussed in 2.3.

The material offered would need to be 'multi-cultural' rather than overtly Christian, with inclusions from all major faiths.

Secondly, a comparable information pack should be available to all couples getting married whether in church or through the Registry Office.[34] Clergy involved in marriage preparation may want to expand the pack with their own methods, interviews certainly and the use of their own or published questionnaires. A relatively low cost option would be for all couples approaching a church or registry office to be given a copy of 'Growing Together – A Guide to Couples Getting Married', supplemented with an invitation to attend a more formal marriage preparation course.

The church has a very clear understanding of what constitutes marriage and how it should be celebrated: civil marriage achieves a similar end but without necessarily embracing what are perceived to be Christian ethics. The situation that marriage does not address is that of cohabitating couples who are convinced they have commitment and want security in their relationship but are not yet ready to assume the social and kinship responsibilities implicit in marriage. It should never be assumed that these couples do not take their vows seriously – if that were the case, they would not embark on any sort of relationship. The church has very little to offer cohabiting couples: one proposal comes through a reintroduction of betrothal, though this may not give them all the security they seek.[35] For this reason, I have developed betrothal into what I have called 'Committed Relationship', that would offer a preparation for living together and the potential for marriage with some legal security.

8.3 Cohabitation and Pastoral Outreach

Cohabitation and marriage have been spawned through two different mentalities, one for stability, and another for permanence. Both may share a common commitment to faithfulness and mutual support, but differ in that in this country, there is no legal recognition of cohabitation. Also, there are couples in-between who look to marriage for their own and, increasingly, family security but still seek some of the independence that cohabitation gives to their lifestyle. Marriage represents a step-change in their status that does not necessarily address the needs of those who wish to

[34] This will include private venues now licensed for marriages.
[35] See 3.4.3.

retain a degree of separateness in their relationship rather than the full sharing that is marriage. The proposal here is to support the reintroduction of the ancient rite of betrothal and in addition, to introduce a new status of 'Committed Relationship'. The rationale is to provide a framework that will enable couples to achieve a limited degree of security sooner, but at the same time, allow the church to encourage couples towards marriage.

A consequence of the introduction of Civil Partnership for same-sex couples is that heterosexual, cohabiting couples are now questioning their lack of legal security: under current legislation, any legal support is limited to benefits to which they may be entitled as individuals, even though at an emotional level, their relationship may be loving, faithful, and stable.[36] The provisions of Civil Partnership give same-sex couples the same legal rights as a married couple solely in return for a commitment to live together, but by signing a Civil Partnership Schedule rather than a Marriage Register, it is not designated 'marriage'. For cohabiting heterosexual couples, there are far-reaching implications if, for example, one partner dies or the couple split up and there are children involved, they have no legal protection whatsoever (wills or 'cohabitation agreements' may offer some protection for cohabiting couples, but it is much easier for these to be challenged through the courts by (say) a disapproving family member). The inevitable response from the married community is to suggest the means of securing these benefits is to get married, but this does not satisfactorily address their problem. Nevertheless, thus, the new legislation on Civil Partnership is prompting heterosexual couples to seek a 'minimum', low-cost marriage at Register Offices, effectively signing to register their relationship and acquire legal rights without the formality of a full-blown wedding.[37]

In a theological context, the question for the church is how it can encourage couples to move their relationship forward, ultimately to marry, within its traditional theology

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[36] The issue of same-sex relationships is a different argument and is only introduced here as it has provided a spur to heterosexual couples to reinforce their security in law.

[37] Even though common law marriage no longer exists in a legal sense, a vestige remains in that cohabiting couples may still have their relationship endorsed by a Registrar: for heterosexual couples, Registrars may conduct a simple ceremony to affirm a relationship without giving it any status or privileges in law, that is, it falls short of a declaration of marriage. The ceremony is conducted at the Registrar's desk, without any of the accoutrements of marriage and involves declarations of their own statements of intent, often accompanied by the exchange of gifts or tokens of their commitment. This is done in the presence of witnesses and confirms a degree of 'social legitimacy' on to a couple's relationship: in many ways, this continues the essential elements of marriage under Common Law. The Registrar's office in Harrogate in 2005 claimed to conduct four to five such ceremonies per month.

of marriage, even though they may feel they not yet ready for the 'full package'. The following sections discuss proposals to help bridge this gap.

8.3.1 Reintroduction of Betrothal

One argument advanced by Thatcher and others is for the reintroduction of a modernised form of betrothal, discussed in Chapter 3. Betrothal has its roots in the historical context of marriage and enables couples to make public their intention to marry, through promises declared *per verba de futuro*, a declaration of their commitment to faithfulness, exchange of rings and affirm an understanding of the ethics of marriage.[38] The appeal of betrothal may be limited: being closely associated with religious order and ritual, couples presenting for betrothal may represent only a very small proportion of the total number deciding to marry, certainly in the UK.[39] However, it could provide the church with a powerful signal that it is serious about promoting marriage and permanent loving relationships.

A degree of success has been claimed in one parish where this has been introduced, though it is not clear how typical this response would be for other churches.[40] The surveys in Harrogate reported in Chapters 4 and 5 revealed a degree of scepticism, both clergy and congregations expressing doubts that betrothal was an appropriate way forward.[41] Respondents were cautious that it would risk creating a pseudo-marriage that still does not carry any legal significance. Secondly, it would not create a permanent bond: it may give a couple some of the benefits conferred by marriage such as social protection for the woman, but would not generate any legal benefits. Thirdly, although betrothal would be celebrated in anticipation of getting married, no time-scale need be set for the marriage and so could remain open-ended.

The ceremony would be conducted as part of regular worship, appropriately at the time of engagement, and could possibly replace the more bland proclamation of

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[38] Although there is no biblical evidence for a betrothal ceremony as such, the museum at Housesteads Roman Fort, Northumberland, has a Roman betrothal ring, and the Antiquities Museum in Newcastle-upon-Tyne has on display a gold mediaeval betrothal ring. Both are from local excavations and provide incidental evidence for betrothal in earlier cultures in Britain as a significant declaration of relationship.
[39] On a flight to Tel Aviv in 1997, a Jewish man in his 20s on his way to a wedding who I knew only as Jacob found the idea of betrothal as foreign to modern Judaism as it is to Western Christianity.
[40] Thatcher, *Living Together*, 276.
[41] To be fair, many were not aware of or did not understand the current debate on betrothal. This is not taken as a valid reason for its rejection.

Banns.[42] The re-introduction of betrothal anticipates that both partners are Christian: resistance to betrothal may arise where one partner is not a church-goer and sees no value in it (though a person may accede to avoid dissension). This raises an issue similar to that of marriage between a believer and non-believer has been a longstanding problem for the church, as highlighted in the discussions on marriage in the early Christian churches (see Chapter 3).[43] If the church were to make betrothal a condition of church marriage, it would almost certainly alienate many who neither understand nor want the change.

A practical complication is that even for those who by virtue of their faith would consider celebrating their betrothal, it is less clear whether they would be duty-bound to marry in church, or even at the church at which the betrothal had been celebrated. The trend towards marrying in secular venues that offer attractive surroundings plus the facility to have the wedding, reception and subsequent party all on one site has little to do with faith, but much to do with the sense of occasion. At a practical level, there are problems for the couple with what would become *a two-stage marriage* such as *when do you have the celebration? When do you invite the relatives and friends?*[44] Whereas betrothal originally represented agreement to link two families through the marriage of their respective offspring, the focus is now on the couple themselves and need not involve the families.

As with any relationship, it cannot be assumed that betrothal would not fail. Dissolution would be by mutual consent: should this occur, both partners would then be free to form new relationships, leading to the possibility of 'serial betrothal', effectively promoting serial cohabitation. Any encouragement towards this could exacerbate the trend towards marriage becoming a minority lifestyle. A particular concern arising from the clergy survey was that a couple should not enter an open-ended engagement under the pretence of *checking that the relationship is going to work. You get engaged because you think your relationship is going to work, not that it may founder.*[45] The assumption that marriage would automatically follow is also questionable: by making promises to faithfulness, the temptation may be for the

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[42] A. R. Harcus, *The Case for Betrothal*, in Adrian Thatcher (ed.), *celebrating Christian Marriage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 49.
[43] The solution adopted by the Roman Catholic marriage for couples coming to marriage is that at least one of them should be a Catholic and both should be baptised.
[44] C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.
[45] C008: Anglican/Liberal-Catholic.

couple to become content with their semi-formal status, mistaken in their belief that they have the same security as if they were married. From a pastoral perspective, the breakdown of betrothal, though easier to disentangle where it is by mutual agreement (even though it may be instigated through misconduct by one or other partner), has much in common with divorce. The Roman Catholic Church already has a liturgical rite that is a blessing of an engagement, but there is the presumption *that a marriage date has been set. It is not to sanction living together. If Betrothal is regularising their living together through some sort of liturgical rite, it is saying 'yes, you can stay where you are, you don't have to make a commitment to marriage'.*[46]

The uncertainties surrounding betrothal need not detract from its value as a public declaration of forthcoming marriage. There will be some couples for whom a traditional form of betrothal will be a way forward through the protracted process of organising their wedding, and may even be attractive to couples not closely associated with a worshipping community. For some church-going or church-oriented couples in serious relationships, betrothal may give them a certain degree of personal security through the public knowledge that they are in the first stage of marriage. It may, for them, carry more significance than mere engagement.

There is no suggestion that through betrothal, the church would be condoning cohabitation, though in reality, this would be an immediate interpretation. Anecdotal and statistical data suggest that most if not all couples seeking betrothal will have been living together anyway, possibly for some considerable time. This may well be a reflection of what is actually happening, though cohabitation remains an informal practice and not one the church can readily recognise.[47] Betrothal may do little to address the church's attitude to cohabitation: probably the best it can do is be as certain as it can be that one or both partners have not been coerced into accepting betrothal in the hope that any lingering doubts over their relationship will be extinguished. These are clearly issues for local churches to address.

However strong or otherwise are their links with the church, the problems faced by couples in arranging weddings leave them with insecurities: most couples start cohabiting before their wedding, even start their family, and in doing so, would

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[46] C004: Roman Catholic.
[47] *StC*, 116.

benefit from having some legal support sooner rather than later. For such couples, I propose a two-part extension to betrothal and marriage: an enhanced form of betrothal would be reintroduced to include limited legal protections, to be called 'Committed Relationship'. This could take two forms depending upon whether it is celebrated in church as an adjunct to betrothal, or as a civil event without any religious content. The second part is to introduce a 'new' marriage liturgy to provide a low-key, inexpensive wedding ceremony but one with 'modern' appeal that I have called 'Celebrated Relationship'.

These proposals put into practice the evidence from both theological and social understandings of marriage as part of a continuous journey as a couple continue to move their relationship forward. They are put forward as a Christian response to some of the changes occurring in society that would help the church advance its pastoral oversight and encourage cohabiting couples firstly, towards confirming their relationship and making it more stable and secure, secondly, encouraging permanence by easing the process towards marriage. Part of the church's teaching is to promote moral responsibility in relationships and that can come through the encouragement of long-term attitudes and stability, even if the partners do not, in their current situation, feel able to subscribe fully to the ideal of marriage. However, first I discuss recent recommendations of the Law Commission that would give cohabiting couples certain legal rights, based on their living as though married and the formal response by the Church of England.

8.3.2 Law Commission Proposals and Church of England Response

The Law Commission has recommended legislative changes that would give cohabiting couples who have a child together or have cohabited for a minimum prescribed period certain legal benefits should they decide to separate or one partner dies.[48] The focus of the Law Commission report is, therefore, on the financial implications when a relationship ends such as inheritance, division of property and rights to maintenance, including family support. The provisions of the report are restricted to heterosexual couples who would be required to demonstrate that they

[48] Law Commission, Report 307, 'Cohabitation: The Financial Consequences of Relationship Breakdown', http://www.lawcom.gov.uk/cohabitation.htm (Accessed 10 February 2008); see also 7.2.2.1. The proposals were due to be debated by government, but are currently shelved, pending the outcome of similar changes in Scotland (The Times, 7 March 2008, 15).

could legally engage in a sexual relationship, for example, neither partner is a minor nor a close relative (clause 3.70). The report also recommends that benefits should not be available to partners already in other cohabiting relationships elsewhere, for example, currently married to, in civil partnership with or cohabiting with another party (clause 3.71). The duration of cohabitation within the proposals range from two to five years: the opinion of the commission was that the longer period would give courts some discretion in settling separation disputes (clause 3.63). There is, within the report, provision for couples who have settled their own situation through an 'opt out' agreement, though there was caution over the validity of 'cohabitation agreements' (clauses 5.56-5.61). The Law Commission members sought to uphold the principle of marriage but were less certain of the consequences of their proposals (clauses 2.36-9).[49]

The Church of England made a full response to the Law Commission proposals, acknowledging its own role in contemporary society to promote stability through marriage.[50] It vigorously expressed its support for marriage but recognised the vulnerability of the many couples living together. Whilst reflecting on its mission to uphold standards, it acknowledged the necessity to address situations that fall short of biblical norms. In short, the church accepted the need for some reform within the context of contemporary lifestyles (clauses 5-14) but expressed concern that they should not be seen to undermine marriage, nor make some couples even more vulnerable than they are at present (clauses 15, 16). One of the major concerns of the church surrounded the myth that still abounds amongst cohabiting couples that they have marriage rights under common law and that any reform should be framed to dispel such misunderstandings. There was doubt that this could be achieved if couples know they can anticipate significant legal support just through living together.

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[49] Evidence for the consequences of introducing legal benefits based on duration of cohabitation is patchy. The Law Commission invoked data from Australia and Canada: my own researches have shown that in Canada, where states are increasingly prepared to recognise cohabiting couples as effectively 'married', accorded legal recognition and rights, there has been a marked reduction in the number of married-couple families (Statistics Canada, 'Marriage', http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/famil04.htm?sdi=marriages (24 April 2007)). In the Seychelles, where 'living en-menage' is practiced, the prediction is that marriage will disappear in about one 'marriage generation' (See 2.4.2.). It would be a retrograde step if the government were to allow situations to develop here that exacerbated the already decline in marriage rates.

[50] Church of England, Mission and Public Affairs Council, 'Law Commission Consultation Paper No. 179, 'Cohabitation: The Financial Consequences'', http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/socialpublic/marriagefamily/cobahitation.pdf (10 February 2008).

The church also raised its concern for the protection of children, whatever their family structure. A partner who has sacrificed going to work for the purposes of nurturing their children may be financially, wholly dependant on their partner. If they separate, they could be severely disadvantaged if left with a family to support and no visible means other than state benefits (clause 21). The criterion to be applied, whether or not children were involved, was that there should not be a 'manifold injustice', that has arisen because of the relationship, interpreted in a qualitative as well as quantitative sense (clause 33).

After presenting their arguments, the church concluded that the Law Commission proposals were preferable to creating a new legal status that would incorporate the legal protections proposed, but could have the effect of seriously undermining marriage. Their argument was that a new legal status would create an environment where couples saw a need for marriage and its intent for permanence even less than they do at present and would see little point in moving their relationship on to marriage.

Although through a wealth of submitted evidence, the law commission correctly identified many of the problems facing cohabiting couples, their proposals are, in my opinion, fundamentally flawed because they continue to raise uncertainties. I disagree with the principle that cohabiting couples should be given legal support without having given an adequate demonstration of their commitment in return. There are some obvious practical difficulties in implementing the reform, for example, what was the starting point of their cohabitation, when did a couple start 'living as married' as opposed to sharing a room, going on holiday or moving in together for short periods. Are they cohabiting for mere convenience? To prescribe a fixed duration is to impose an artificial constraint on a very uncertain process. In adjudicating over their separation, a court would have to assess how strong is their commitment. A relationship may appear stable, but how can this be judged? From comments made in the course of the surveys, both clergy and congregations would have found the questions discussed in the consultations difficult to answer.

The legal rights being discussed relate solely to issues of separation, but this opens the door to extending more of the benefits of marriage to cohabiting couples. Ultimately, through 'creeping' legislation, the church and state could be forced to recognise

cohabiting couples as married, even though they have made no public commitment. In addition, I disagree with the church's response that the introduction of a new legal status would necessarily discourage couples from moving on to marriage. Many of the couples whose situations are being addressed have already effectively rejected marriage, at least in the short-term, by virtue of their living together. Marriage may not their primary lifestyle choice. The Law Commission proposals would risk exacerbating an already rising culture of failure with the implied assumption that relationships are destined to remain short-term.

The surveys revealed concern amongst local churches that whilst cohabitation may have some benefits, it embraces too many easy options. Although some couples assume the ethics and responsibilities pertaining to marriage, particularly those in pre-marital cohabitation, many have no long-term aspirations. A task for the church is to help all couples form permanent relationships, preferably within marriage, and this, I believe, is done best by giving them a status that would form a first stage to becoming married.

8.3.3 Committed Relationship

In contradiction to the Law Commission recommendation, my own proposal is for the introduction of a new status that I have called Committed Relationship. This would be based on betrothal but would operate within a civil legal framework, not unlike the way Civil Partnership caters for same-sex couples. Committed Relationship would require from couples a declaration of commitment in exchange for certain legal rights.[51] Civil Partnership, for same-sex couples, requires no more than cohabitation, whereas the emphasis in Committed Relationship would be on faithfulness and mutual support. In parallel with Civil partnership, Committed Relationship would encourage a couple to bring their relationship into the public domain without calling it marriage.

Before entering Committed Relationship, a couple would need to confirm that they would be ordinarily free to marry according to civil law even though they are not, at this stage, actually getting married. In a church context, this would include their satisfying canon law also. Their Committed Relationship status would be confirmed

[51] The complexities of family law are such that any suggestions made here would require expert legal consideration, beyond the scope of the present thesis.

in a formal ceremony, though this may be as brief or extended as required. Much would depend on the degree of family involvement. Both partners would be required to sign a Schedule (as happens for Civil Partnership): unlike civil partnership, this would not automatically sanction their living together as a couple, only that they are committed to each other (as in betrothal) with an understanding of marriage. By signing a schedule and not a marriage register, they would not be entitled to describe themselves as married.

The rite could be celebrated in a religious or civil environment. In a church situation, the ceremony would parallel betrothal and could be incorporated into existing worship patterns as appropriate. The incumbent would be acting as Registrar for the purposes of signing the Schedule. As with betrothal, the couple would declare their promises for faithfulness and mutuality, inviting God's blessing on the relationship. Committed Relationship would signal a natural progression towards marriage. Couples could remain free to continue their semi-married status, having formalised their relationship, and although they cannot be forced to marry, there would be every encouragement to do so.

A question not resolved is whether couples celebrating Committed Relationship in church would receive a element of relationship education, equivalent to marriage preparation. In a civil environment, there would be no religious content but there would still be a need to make their promises to demonstrate their commitment and could include an understanding of marriage. A relationship education package of a form comparable to that proposed for couples marrying in Register Offices would be appropriate, as discussed in 8.2.4.

Committed Relationship would attract certain legal benefits, though not the full benefit pertaining to marriage. For example, though there would be sharing of joint assets, it would not extend to sharing each other's personal assets during life, nor be legally responsible for each other's personal debts, though either may be done informally. Essentially, partners would be entitled to retain control over their individual wealth should this be their intention: this is a feature of cohabitation, giving rise to a certain degree of autonomy and independence. However, they would include full parental rights over their children should they decide to start a family.

If the couple decide to separate, then they would have the support of the courts over matters of distribution of joint assets created during their cohabitation, but not their personal wealth except where this has been generated as an outcome of the relationship. The provisions on the death of a partner would include inheritance of a partner's assets, assumption of tenancy and housing rights and custody of their children.

Committed Relationship offers, I believe, a much more secure way forward than the Law Commission initiatives. The emphasis in my proposal is on commitment and faithfulness: cohabitation is not a necessary a requirement: in reality, it will be central to most relationships but that is for the couple themselves to decide. The intention of Committed Relationship is to encourage a climate of greater stability in all relationships: the legal provisions, arrived at by myself independently, are greater than the recommendations of the Law Commission and would give to those couples who wanted it, formal recognition of their relationship and status in society. If the church has any intent in promoting long and enduring relationships, in or outside of marriage, providing always an incentive to move on to marriage, then it should, in my view, move to resist the Law Commission proposals when ultimately, they are debated in Parliament. A better way forward would be for the church to support or even sponsor an Act of Parliament for the introduction of Committed Relationship.

An important theological implication attached to both betrothal and committed relationship is the separation of the promises of intent, *per verba de futuro*, and declaration of commitment in the present tense, *per verba de presenti*. This in itself would require changes to the established marriage liturgy, to cater for couples who have already been through a betrothal-type ceremony, returning to the biblical and historical tradition.

Committed Relationship has been discussed solely in the context of heterosexual relationships. However, since there is no direct reference to cohabitation, it could apply to other couples sharing their lives but in a non-sexual way, for example, same-sex couples in a caring-sharing situation or two unmarried or widowed persons living together for companionship as well as economic reasons. The legal benefits attached to Committed Relationship would give them additional security and an opportunity to have their relationship blessed in church could be more attractive to them than have to

consider civil partnership with its implications of homosexuality. Therein lies the problem: its extension to any sort of same-sex partnerships could find the church unwittingly coerced into blessing same-sex sexual relationships, something it has steadfastly resisted, in spite of intensive lobbying from gay Christian and other organisations.[52] Pressure to introduce liturgies for same-sex relationships will undoubtedly continue, but any extension of Committed Relationship beyond heterosexual couples would require very careful consideration: local clergy would find it an unacceptable responsibility if they were to be the ultimate arbiters.

This does not preclude consideration being given to a Carer's Charter in some comparable form, but is not considered here.

With or without the church's encouragement, the natural course for heterosexual relationships is to develop and eventually and proceed to marriage. There are many couples who would prefer to marry in church but do not want the very visible, public wedding, preferring instead to marry quietly, without fuss, and without the accompanying reception, photographers and all the other appendages that are integral to the traditional 'white' wedding. One of the findings from the surveys was that there are some couples who have a real fear of weddings and the public exposure involved. Others are cautious that a traditional wedding would change their relationship internally as well as with their peers in ways not desired. For this reason, I introduce a complimentary proposal, that of 'Celebrated Relationship', that would provide a route to church marriage that embodies much less formality and be attractive to couples wanting an 'alternative' church wedding.

8.3.4 Celebrated Relationship

I believe there is a need for a form of church marriage that does not have the same associations as a traditional 'white wedding', but at the same time enables a couple to bring their relationship before God. Clergy and congregations interviewed in Harrogate agreed that couples should always be encouraged to move their relationships forward, but some find a church wedding intimidating and opt for a civil wedding, though this may not be their preferred choice.

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[52] A particular concern of C009: Anglican/Liberal-Evangelical.

The creation of a new marriage liturgy that I have called 'Celebrated Relationship' would incorporate the essentials of the marriage service with exchange of vows *per verba de presenti,* conducted with the same legal authority as any other form of marriage, the issue of a marriage certificate and the signing of the marriage register. Celebrated Relationship is first and foremost, marriage, declared publicly and legally: in this, there is no argument. It is not designed to create some sort of in-between status between cohabitation and marriage; this is done through Committed Relationship. Instead, it is to celebrate the fulfilment of a growing relationship through marriage, the difference being that it can be achieved with a minimum of cost and fuss.

Celebrated Relationship would enable the church to present marriage with a modern image and totally different to that of the traditional 'white wedding'. It allows the church to offer a 'modernised' liturgy that does not depart from its basic theology of marriage but conforms to biblical precedent. The ideals of Christian marriage still apply and couples would be expected to respect and aspire to these just as much as if they were embarking on a 'white wedding'. It would encourage couples with sufficient faith to want God's blessing on their relationship to celebrate marriage in church rather than the Register Office. The evidence from both congregation and clergy surveys is that marriage in church can have much greater personal significance. It is important to note that through celebrated relationship, the couple are married but by giving the ceremony a different name, it has the capacity to alter the whole perception of church marriage. Marriage is kept within the public domain, but is oriented specifically towards the needs of some couples.

It is envisaged that couples who have married in this way may come eventually to want to make a much more public declaration. Clearly, they cannot remarry, but the restatement of their marriage vows in a public service, as described above and already practiced in many churches, would be appropriate.

The introduction of Betrothal, Committed Relationship and Celebrated Relationship would fit well with the overall mission of the church to provide a natural means of confirming love and commitment, helping couples move their relationships forward. More importantly, it would enable them to bring their relationship before God at each stage and help the church reach out to sections of society from whom it presently

tends to be isolated: every person who comes 'through the door' represents an opportunity for meaningful contact (though not necessarily overt evangelism that would probably deter them).

Couples, whether or not cohabiting, would be free to go directly to Celebrated Relationship if their priority was for a small wedding: whatever route was chosen, there would be a degree of marriage preparation.

The proposals outlined here, if implemented, would bring about a radical enhancement of the marriage process and how both church and society approach relationships. The essential features are summarised and compared with current practice in Table 8.1 (the new proposals are shown in red) :-

	ENGAGEMENT	BETROTHAL	COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP	TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE	CELEBTATED RELATIONSHIP	CIVIL PARTNERSHIP
Nature	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Heterosexual	Same-sex
Ceremonial	Secular	Religious	Civil or Religious	Civil or Religious	Religious	Civil
Requirements	Free to marry Consent	Free to marry *(Canon law)* Consent	Free to marry *(Canon law – Religious)* Consent Witnesses Sign Schedule	Free to marry *(Canon law – Religious)* Consent Witnesses Sign Register	Free to marry *(Canon law)* Consent Witnesses Sign Register	Free to contract CP Consent to cohabit witnesses Sign Schedule
Declarations	Promise to faithfulness Intention to marry *Promises de futuro*	Promise to faithfulness Intention to marry *Promises de futuro*	Promise to faithfulness Intention to marry *Promises de futuro*	Marital Promises *de presenti*	Marital Promises *de presenti*	Promise to faithfulness *(Optional)*
Legal Status	Single - Not married	Single	Legally Contracted Relationship	Married	Married	Legally Contracted Relationship
Social Benefits	Informal status Personal security Relationship security Family involvement *(Optional)* Cultural norm	Informal status Personal security Relationship security Family involvement *(Optional)* Cultural norm Blessing	Formal status Personal security Relationship security Family involvement *(Optional)* Blessing *(Religious)*	Married Personal security Relationship security Family involvement *(Optional)* Traditional Blessing *(Religious)* Expensive	Married Personal security Relationship security Family involvement *(Optional)* Aspires to tradition Blessing Low cost	Formal status Personal security Relationship security Family involvement *(Optional)*
Legal Benefits	None	None	Inheritance on death Housing/Tenancy Full parental rights Right to arrange funeral Medical consent Petition to separate	Sharing lifetime wealth Responsibility for debts Inheritance on death Housing/Tenancy Full parental rights Right to arrange funeral Medical consent Petition to divorce	Sharing lifetime wealth Inheritance on death Housing/Tenancy Full parental rights Right to arrange funeral Medical consent Petition to divorce	Sharing lifetime wealth Inheritance on death Housing/Tenancy (Full parental rights)* Right to arrange funeral Medical consent Petition to separate

Table 8.1 Committed and Celebrated Relationship: Relationship to Tradition Norms and Summary of Requirements and Benefits.

* In a same-sex relationship, this will embrace responsibility for each other's children by previous relationships.

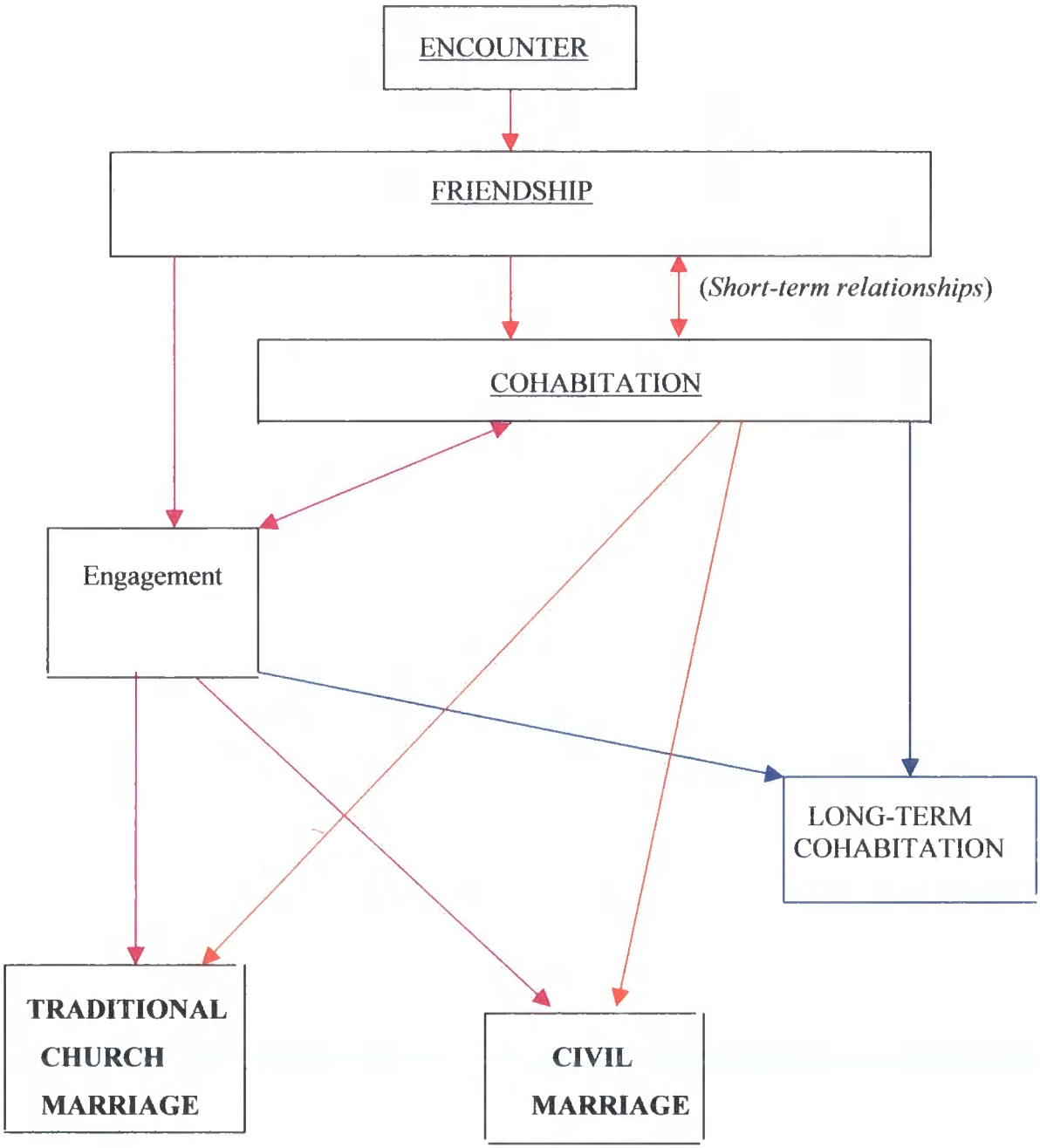
8.4 Encounter to Marriage

The progress from encounter to marriage may be long and tortuous, and proceed in many different directions depending on the attitudes of the individuals concerned. The introduction of the new liturgies could make the process appear even more convoluted. I have therefore produced produce flow-charts that illustrate how Betrothal, Committed Relationship, and Celebrated Relationship would fit into existing patterns and actually ease the process towards marriage in both a church and civil context.

The essential step in any relationship is the development of a close friendship from an initial encounter. This friendship is described in Chapter 7 and is the source of the mutual support that couples give to each other throughout the duration of their relationship, and sustains them through the inevitable difficulties and changes that occur in the longer term. For a majority of couples cohabitation is shown as the next stage after forming the friendship, whether or not they eventually marry. For those who do go on to marry, their relationship may develop in several different ways: they may proceed directly to marriage (usually via some informal 'engagement' or understanding of their intentions), through a church celebration of their relationship, to be discussed in 8.4.2, or a civil celebration of their relationship, discussed in 8.4.3. The various routes from encounter to marriage are described below.

8.4.1 Encounter to Marriage – Contemporary Practice

From an initial encounter, a friendship forms. As the friendship intensifies, consideration may be given to either becoming engaged, thereby signalling an intention to marry, or to cohabit in an open-ended potentially long-term relationship. Cohabitation may be regarded as a means of addressing economic or social difficulties, a precursor to marriage or merely testing the relationship. Whatever the motivation, the choice for getting married is between a traditional church wedding or a civil ceremony: for many couples, the latter, particularly when celebrated in an interesting or exotic venue may become their first choice. A representation of contemporary practice is shown in Fig 8.1(a) :-



KEY

Engagement + Marriage (with or without Cohabitation).

Cohabitation + Marriage.

Long-term Cohabitation.

Fig. 8.1(a) Progression From Encounter to Marriage (Current Practice)

The relationships that carry legal benefits are shown in bold. The arrows show the direction of progression, but where there is a double-ended arrow, the order of

progression may be reversed. For example, cohabitation may precede or supersede engagement to allow for relationships developing differently. What the relationship flow-chart does not indicate is what happens when relationships end, whether breakdown of cohabitation or divorce in marriage. In many instances, a new 'encounter' and 'friendship' will develop before an existing relationship is terminated or may precipitate its dissolution.

Couples in short-term relationships will normally occupy the space between 'friendship' and 'cohabitation'. There is no presumption that they will not endeavour to take their relationship further, but this is conjectural.

8.4.2 Encounter to Marriage - Church

The introduction of betrothal and committed relationship, celebrated in church, plus celebrated relationship expands the tradition for engagement plus church marriage. Couples may still decide to cohabit at any stage during this process: depending on circumstances, this may develop into a long-term relationship outside of marriage. The route from encounter to marriage in a church environment is shown in Fig. 8.1(b):-

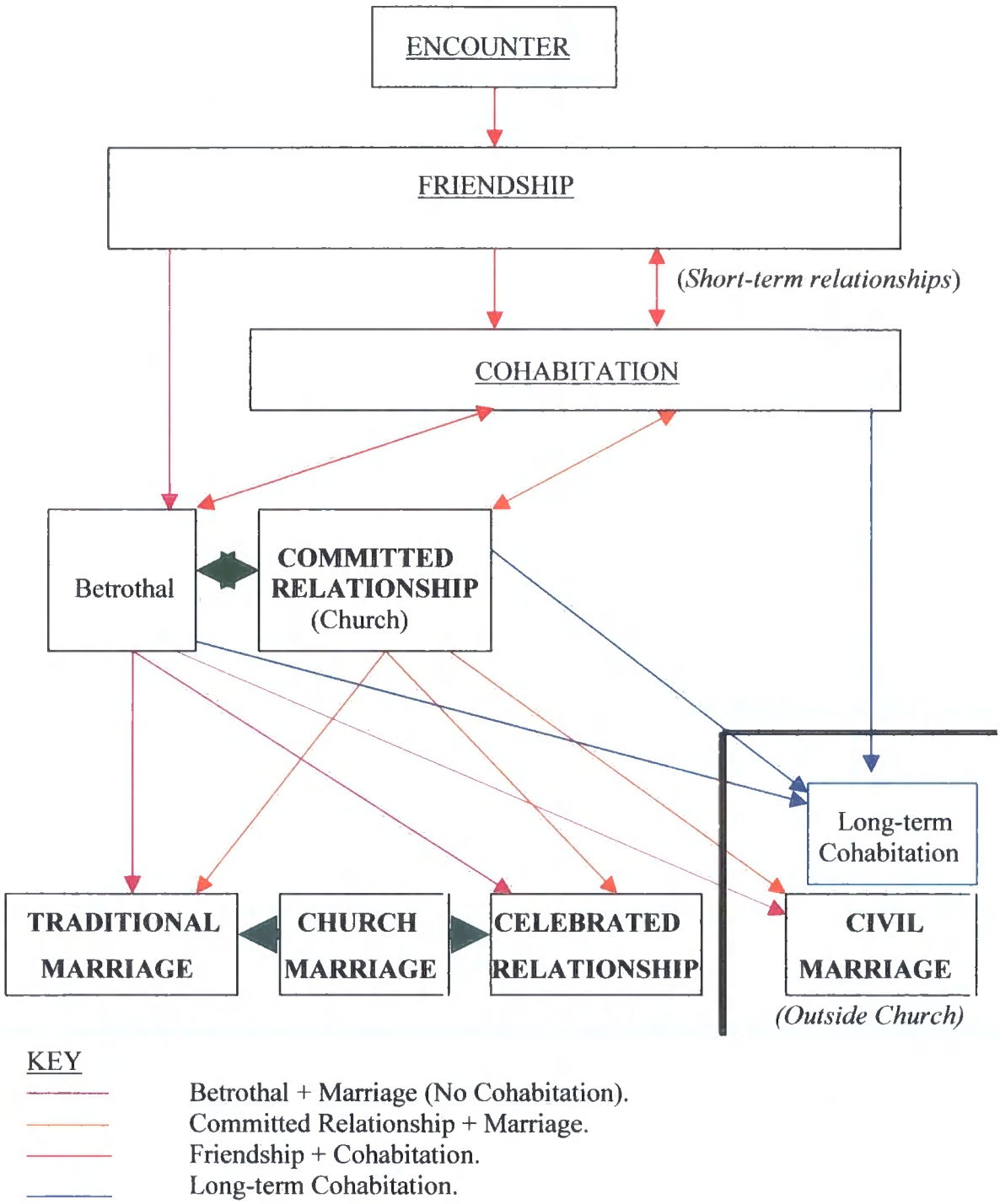


Fig. 8.1(b) Progression From Encounter to Marriage (Church)

As in the previous figure, relationships that carry legal benefits are shown in bold.

Whether for religious or other reasons, there will be some couples who will decide not to live together before getting married and their progression from encounter to marriage is shown in purple. The tradition is for them to get engaged then move on to

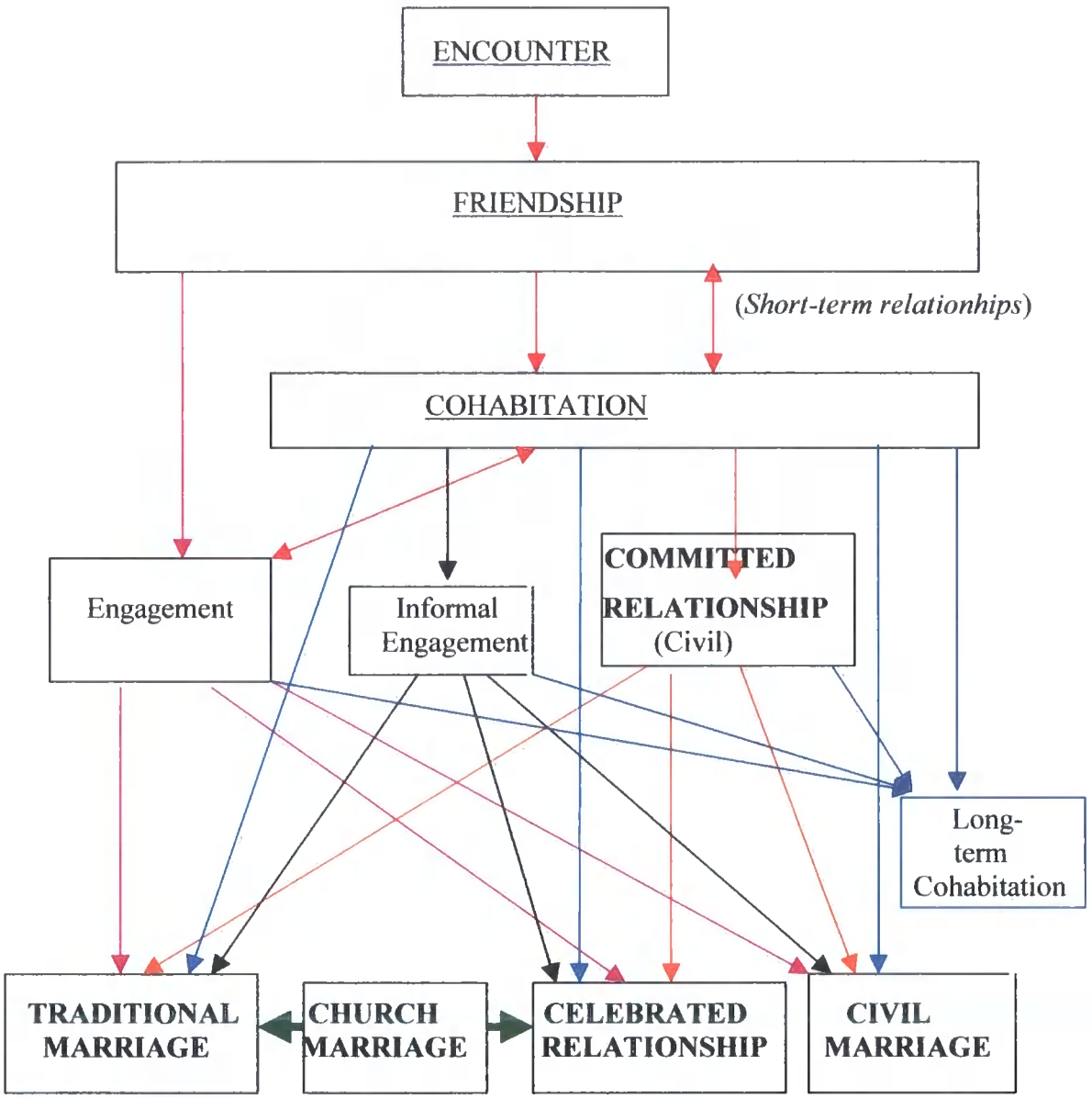
marriage: the three options of a traditional church marriage, civil marriage, or celebrated relationship marriage are all open to them, provided they satisfy the appropriate civil and canon law requirements. Betrothal offers an alternative to engagement, to confirm their relationship before God: in reality, couples may follow both engagement and betrothal. The weakness betrothal is that it gives no additional protection in law. When weddings can take a long time to arrange, a couple is likely to have already made considerable investments in a home and family in advance. In addition, if they decide to separate before their wedding, they may be faced with unnecessary difficulties in apportioning their input to the relationship at a time of great emotional stress. For these reasons, the church may encourage couples towards the enhanced betrothal liturgy, Committed Relationship. Whether opting for betrothal or Committed Relationship, the couple would have to declare their commitment before God and their congregation: in the latter, the incumbent would then be acting as registrar, as for marriages, and no doubt command an enhanced fee! various options for marriage as the next step after achieving committed relationship status would be open to them. These range from the full blown 'white wedding' in church with Celebrated Relationship as an alternative, through to a civil ceremony tailored to their needs but without any religious content.

A couple may still decide to cohabit by choice in a long-term relationship, indicated in dark blue. This is an option open to all couples not actually married: a difference introduced here is that there may be couples opting for committed relationship but who do not wish to proceed to marriage. This would then give them limited legal benefits as discussed above.

The alternative to approaching marriage within the church environment is to follow an entirely civil route, described below.

8.4.3 Encounter to Marriage - Civil

The second case to consider is the secular or civil route from encounter to marriage, shown in Fig. 8.1(c) :



KEY

- Engagement +Marriage (No Cohabitation).
- Cohabitation + Marriage.
- Cohabitation + Informal Engagement +Marriage.
- Committed Relationship + Marriage.
- Friendship + Cohabitation.
- Long-term Cohabitation.

Fig. 8.1(c) Progression From Encounter to Marriage (Civil Route)

The interpretation of the flow diagram is similar to that described above. Similar caveats and remarks relating to short-term relationships apply as for the church-based flow diagram.

The way to marriage for couples who choose not to cohabit before marriage is again shown in purple, those embarking on long-term cohabitation in blue. For couples wishing to declare their relationship, engagement has become the traditional secular means of doing so. Committed Relationship, celebrated at a Register Office, would parallel engagement and offer a civil equivalent to the church-based liturgy: there would be no religious content, simply an affirmation of their faithfulness and the signing of the Schedule. As with Civil Partnership, this could be done with a minimum of formality, or in an extended service in the presence of family and friends.

All options for marriage are available, though couples following a civil route may be expected to opt for a civil rather than church wedding. The introduction of celebrated relationship as a means of allowing couples to marry in church without all the trimmings of a traditional church wedding opens new possibilities for the church to encourage more couples to commit their marriage before God. This presents an opportunity to forge links with families that would not otherwise be made.

8.4.4 Assimilation of Betrothal, Committed and Celebrated Relationship

What these 'relationship maps' in conjunction with the previous sections show is how the proposed introduction of Betrothal, Committed Relationship and Celebrated Relationship extend the existing framework for relationships and marriage. The combination of all three present new challenges for the church and it would clearly be up to each denomination to consider how it could approach their introduction. I would expect there to be marked differences between the non-conformist and sacramental churches because of their differing interpretations of marriage theology and vastly different forms of governance.

Committed Relationship provides a realistic and sensible intermediate stage between forming a serious relationship and marrying. It removes the necessity to marry solely to acquire legal security in their relationship at a time when they may be developing, for example, family responsibilities. Though it does not give the full legal protection

of marriage, there is sufficient to enable a couple manage their relationship with greater confidence. So far as the church is concerned, committed relationship does not compromise its basic theology or doctrine of marriage, but could be a major step in promoting greater stability in relationships as well as encouraging more couples to eventually consider getting married. Since Committed Relationship would be a legally binding contract requiring the couple to demonstrate their eligibility, its introduction would require a notice of intent, equivalent to the posting of wedding banns. The form this would take would need to be decided, but familiarity with existing practices would be a strong incentive to follow established procedures.

The concept of celebrated relationship also presents a new situation for the church, whose notion of marriage is dominated by the big public event attended by family and friends. There are situations when a minister will countenance a 'quiet wedding', usually for an older couple seeking to regularise a long-lasting relationship (the assumption amongst their peers is often that they are already married). Celebrated relationship would make a relatively low-key and by implication, low cost, wedding more widely available and a realistic alternative to a civil wedding. The church could offer access to marriage that is economically attractive and a lot less stressful to the couple. A couple would be required to consent fully to marriage: it is only wedding arrangements that are being simplified. By opening up more opportunities to celebrate their marriage before God, it will enable a couple to move their relationship forward theologically and in accordance with scripture whilst dispensing with some of the peripheral celebrations.

The flow-charts presented above do not necessarily provide a definitive guide to all heterosexual relationships: whereas they show typical patterns that will be readily identifiable, in reality, there is no limit to the number of ways couples may organise, manage, even manipulate their relationships to suit their particular circumstances. What can never be certain is that, whatever the incentives, a couple will not opt for long-term cohabitation and the degree of personal independence that engenders.

There are always risks attached to any form of change, not only for the church, but for the culture also. The risks to marriage have already been discussed. However, there is also a risk to cohabitation itself, if it is dragged into some sort of quasi-formal structure and efforts to encourage greater stability in all relationships could be

undermined. The consequence could be to encourage the development of lifestyles even further removed from marriage than cohabitation, where commitment becomes minimal such as are described below.

8.5 Relationships Beyond Cohabitation

Cohabitation has passed through the barrier of condemnation, rarely now attracting epithets such as 'living in sin', unless the relationship is deliberately abusive, either to each other or to a third party or is a deliberate attempt to break up another marriage or relationship. As discussed in Chapter 3, cohabitation is in part a response to the sociological debate on the ways women have been disadvantaged by traditional attitudes within marriage. Through the development, for example, of family planning, many of the arguments that caused women to be suppressed have been addressed, opening up educational, career, and social opportunities not hitherto possible. In this respect, cohabitation and marriage have moved ever closer together, to the extent that the only real differences are the legal imperatives.

Social structures are continuing to change and there are two particular lifestyles that have emerged relatively recently that should be attracting the attention of theologians as well as sociologists. The first of these is what I have called 'cohabiting singleness', that is, an essentially single lifestyle that involves short-term sexual liaisons. The second is 'intentional single parentage'. These will now be discussed and will provide openings for further work in the area of personal relationships

8.5.1 Cohabiting Singleness and Short-Term Relationships

Although short-term relationships have received less attention in this thesis, there is an interaction with long-term cohabitation and a number of issues to be addressed, particularly with an increasing population of single people. Jesus confirmed that to remain single was an appropriate response to the Kingdom: Christian theologians have interpreted Jesus' edict as referring to people who have chosen to lead a celibate life, regarding celibacy as a particular gift from God. However, in Western society today, in addition to those made single through bereavement or divorce, there is a trend towards later marriage that is generating significant numbers of single persons not in any sort of permanent relationship: except in a few specific cases such as

Roman Catholic clergy, monks and nuns, celibacy cannot be assumed. Neither may it cannot be assumed that a couple marrying are each in their first serious relationship. The rising age at first marriage, discussed in Chapter 2, 30.1 years for men and 28.0 years for women, gives no indication of the distributions of ages at first marriage, but there are likely to be many men and women who do not marry much below the age of 40. It follows that by the time they come to marriage, they may have had a large number of sexual experiences: most could not be justified in being called anything other than a casual encounter, others may constitute a potentially serious but nevertheless finite serial relationship. One respondent to the clergy survey reacted against the social tolerance for couples sleeping together on an almost casual basis, a problem the church should be addressing: *you think you love someone, you live with them, you go to bed with them, and society gives the message 'It's normal, acceptable'*.[53]

A series of short-term relationships implies that choices are being made. This is not to deny that long-term cohabitation and marriage are not also founded on choice, but that the process is heavily weighted towards sexual compatibility to the detriment of other qualities. No matter how important sexual satisfaction may be to the younger person, the expectation that libido will continue at the same level throughout a person's life is unrealistic and a lifelong relationship demands that other compensating qualities are needed to ensure its durability. The underlying strength of friendship is an important factor: when so many relationships are sexually driven, a key question would be 'if you could not have sex, would you still want to live with this person?' This gives another reason for the church and other social organisations to encourage better relationship education stressing the value of friendship as part of a strategy to promote greater stability in all relationships.

Those indulging in cohabiting singleness are likely to be men seeking sexual adventure (though I have no more than the anecdotal evidence that men are less inclined than women to move towards marriage). However, another form of singleness, populated mostly by women, is a move towards intentional single

[53] C019: Methodist/Evangelical.

parentage, where a child is deliberately deprived of being raised in a two-parent household.[54]

8.5.2 Intentional Single Parentage

Whereas many of those described as cohabiting single may eventually go on to marry or at least form long-term relationships, a potential disruption to society from one particular form of singleness that further threatens disintegration of the nuclear family is that of intentional single parentage. This is when a woman deliberately seeks to have a child with the intention of enjoying motherhood but has no desire to form any kind of permanent relationship with the father. By rejecting the father, the mother has denied him any role or responsibility for the child's upbringing; alternatively, there may be no intention on the part of the father to take any responsibility for the child. In either case, there is a distortion of God's intention for humankind and yet another subtle manipulation of society's attitudes. Previous generations may have insisted on a 'shot-gun' marriage for the sake of respectability, to cover up the person's indiscretion, or the girl forced to have an abortion. Human rights attitudes are now more likely to dissuade women from this latter course of action, whatever circumstances of conception, but instead find ways to keep and nurture the child.

There are potential social problems also: for example, if the child is a boy, then by the time he reaches his teens, he will almost certainly be bigger and physically stronger than his mother and without the nurture of a father figure, much less easy to control and discipline.

It is very difficult to obtain quantitative evidence on the extent of intentional single parentage: such statistics as I have been able to find are discussed in 2.2.3. To these, may be added anecdotal evidence: I am aware of three women in the Harrogate area, all with some church connections, who have embarked upon intentional single parentage. The first is an older woman who had two children who are now middle aged. The father has remained a closely guarded secret and appears not to have had any familial involvement with the children's upbringing. A second example is a girl whose family is closely connected to a church in Harrogate and has a two-year old

[54] This is distinct from single parentage arising through, for example, accidental pregnancy in younger people experimenting with sex with inadequate contraception, either through ignorance or carelessness.

child. She is raising her child as a single parent, with support from her own as well as the church family. A third example is a teenager, also with church connections, who has recently become pregnant, but has no current intention of marrying or living with the father. None of the persons concerned would see themselves as being irresponsible (though others may hold differing views). The congregation survey (Chapter 5) raised a situation of a more mature woman's experience: an anecdote related concerned a person in her early thirties, from a church background *got engaged and was soon pregnant. The boy broke off the engagement, when he heard about the baby, and my friend made an absolute classic remark: it wasn't --'s fault that the relationship broke up. She slept with --'s best friend (but before they were actually engaged) raising doubts over paternity. To sleep with somebody's best friend does not show the commitment needed in marriage. She's proving a better mother than her behaviour might have suggested, but no one seems to realise the need for a father for stability in the child's life.*[55]

The emergence on intentional single parentage is symptomatic changes in attitudes to relationships that have emerged in recent years. Firstly, the advent of reliable contraception means that (in theory) women may now choose to control their sexuality and fertility and consequently have the facility to control when and by whom to become pregnant without reference to the traditional values of love and faithfulness. Whether or not in a long-term relationship, the woman rather than the man may become the controlling partner in their sex life: in a relatively short period of time, traditional patterns of family that have persisted and grown over many centuries are being substantially redirected. Secondly, through education and State Benefits, women have yet greater ability to become economically self-sufficient. This removes once a major incentive to marry, the majority pattern for previous generations, or cohabit. Thirdly, the stigma of becoming pregnant whilst unmarried has now gone. It no longer spells financial disaster or worse, institutionalisation: family and friends may now even rejoice in the event.[56] A fourth ramification is that a woman may want more than one child, but it will not necessarily be to the same father, creating families of half siblings. If the woman then decides to form a permanent relationship with yet another partner (who may have children of his own)

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[55] L282: ONC/Liberal/female/married/45-60

[56] Up to about 1960, a frequent sight on a Sunday morning in Harrogate was the group of unmarried mothers from the local 'home' being escorted to church.

and eventually marry, it leads to a plethora of kinship relationships with entirely unrelated family members.

Theologically, intentional single parentage is contrary to the message of Creation, where the ideal for humankind is for two 'strangers', a man and woman, to bond together to form a monogamous, loving, and permanent relationship. It breaks the order of Creation in two respects. Firstly, the intention is not to form a permanent relationship with a partner. Secondly, the focus of the family relationship changes from the child being the product of the primary parental bond to the parent-child becoming the primary bond. In a normative relationship, the bond between children and their parents is secondary to the relationship or marriage bond with lower order bonds to other family members. These are identified as kinship ties that help hold families together. In intentional single parentage, the reformed primary bond is one-sided, asymmetrical and does not conform to the tradition. In the Judaic understanding, children are seen as a blessing on the marriage: in the Christian understanding, children may not necessary for the fulfilment of a relationship or marriage, but should always be linked to the parents through symmetrical bonds. When people lived in extended families, kinship was a way of defining family responsibilities. As the so-called nuclear family emerged as an identifiable unit, kinship continued to provide vital family links.[57] However, as families have become dispersed, family responsibilities are becoming much less well defined. Intentional single parentage risks taking away the unique benefits and security generally attributed to the nuclear family, and relies on surrogacy from other family members to provide the support normally given by the absent partner.

I am aware that single parentage may arise through 'natural' causes, such as bereavement, leaving one parent with the task of nurturing the children. Where one parent has died, an emotional-spiritual influence is likely to remain through memory and this may continue to provide a stabilising effect on the family, and may even bring other relationships within or between the families closer together. Other situations of temporary enforced single parentage may arise one partner, usually the

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[57] The nuclear family, as currently understood, is a concept that Goody associates particularly with industrialisation and the growth of urban living. (Goody, *European Family*, 141).

My interpretation of Goody's arguments is that the nuclear family has always been at the heart of society, and an implicit structural element in societies even where the custom has been for extended families.

father, is involuntarily excluded from the family unit and from the life of the mother and child: such situations arise if the absent parent is in custody, or working away from home.[58]

Single parentage may also come about through divorce, though there will often be access and the absent parent will continue to have a presence. Both parents may both continue to play some part in the upbringing of the child. Following the dissolution of a marriage, it is usually the mother who retains custody of the children. Not does the number of children brought up without the influence of their biological father rise, but that through serial cohabitation, children may be subject to a series of differing male influences.[59]

When the parent-child bond becomes the primary bond, the whole theological-sociological family structure that has emerged through the arguments discussed in Chapters 3 to 7 begin to break down to the extent that single parentage makes little or no contribution to the cohesion of society. The cone of encompassment model developed in Chapter 6 works through the linking of families, to create a genealogy that defines one's place in the order of Creation. With single parentage, the cone of encompassment breaks down where one progenitor is not identified: family links are absent, denying the creation of symmetrical kinship ties that is one of the major outcomes of marriage.[60]

Likewise, the friendship-mapping model for the development of relationships breaks down. All parents need friendship, but the friendship bond is similarly distorted, with the child supplying part of the parent's friendship needs. The argument does become more complicated when one considers the need to redefine friendship roles following bereavement of divorce, or even pronged absence of one parent.[61] Clearly, a child cannot properly fulfil the friendship role of a spouse.

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[58] Such relationships should not be confused with single parentage arising through bereavement, whether through accident or illness, even separation through divorce: the missing partner/parent is usually still present in spirit and acknowledged through memories, photographs.

[59] The same considerations apply less to adoption, where considerable care by an independent third party is exercised over the placement of children.

[60] This is already being recognised by the government through a proposal to force women to reveal the father's identity of their child's birth certificate as part of an initiative to secure support for the child, Hansard, Monday 24 July 2006.

[61] My wife was in this situation brought about by her father being in the RAF, firstly in India during WWII, when communication was spasmodic, and then when he was relocated to Germany for extended periods.

One of the risks to society associated with intentional single parentage is the creation of a quasi-matrilineal state where childcare becomes solely the prerogative of women, leaving men free and without responsibility, to satisfy their own needs at will.[62] Figures from a survey carried out in 1990 show that in Great Britain, in common with other Northern European countries, three quarters of adults agree with the proposition that a child needs both a father and mother to grow up happily.[63] This statistic is cited without qualification: it is not clear whether there is any gender bias, how the figures are distributed as a function of age range, ethnicity or any other of the many sociological factors that may be relevant.

In USA, the apparent freedom UMDA has given to marriage continues to disadvantage women through the way it has influenced family life: access to of abortion has led this to be used as an instrument of family planning: babies are allowed to reach term only if it suits the couple concerned in their current situation. The 'easy divorce' clause removes the traditional protections expected from marriage: increasing numbers of children in USA, as here, are now raised by unmarried mothers or in irregular families through marriages breaking up and new relationships being formed. Coercion to leave a marriage has also given rise to increasing numbers of one-parent families.

Single parentage is already making a pastoral impact. Clergy may accept that when the parents are cohabiting, there is at least the potential outcome for a stable and reasonably conventional family unit. The unease begins to develop when dealing when relationships break down, resulting in single parent families. Many clergy acknowledge that single parents have a difficult job: *if you are on your own, you have effectively got to be not just a parent but both mother and father.*[64] *I greatly admire, but do not necessarily approve of single mothers. It must be very hard and some of them do an admirable job without someone to share to problems, share the burdens.*[65] However, clergy are now beginning to recognise there are particular concerns with

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[62] Dormor, *Relationship Revolution, 31.*
[63] Dormor, *Relationship Revolution*, Table 11.
[64] L277: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/45-60; similar view expressed by L301: Anglican/ Evangelical/female/married/45-60.
[65] L277: Anglican/Evangelical/female/married/45-60; similar view expressed by L301: Anglican/ Evangelical/female/married/45-60.

children being nurtured in single parent situations without a stable family structure, though their effect on society is often not appreciated.

There is a challenge here for the church to consider the impact of intentional single parentage on the church family and society, in the same way as it is approaching other forms of relationship.

8.6 Concluding Remarks

In response to weaknesses in the church's approach to cohabitation as a normative relationship, in the course of this chapter, I have identified a number of initiatives that will help the church influence and bring greater stability to all relationships.

There is a clear need in many churches for marriage preparation to be strengthened. It is also evident that marriage preparation is reaching fewer couples as civil marriage at attractive venues becomes more popular. A case is made to make marriage preparation available to all couples, to explain the meaning of the vows they are taking as well as to discuss issues of family, money matters, health and so on. There is a need to build on some limited initiatives such as joint ventures with secular agencies as well as the production of 'marriage preparation packs' to be given to all couples presenting for marriage. The outcome would hopefully be a better understanding of the ideals of marriage amongst couples whether living together or contemplating marriage and to create greater stability in both cohabitation and marriage.

The reintroduction of betrothal plus a new status of Committed Relationship would provide encouragement for cohabiting couples to at least confirm their relationship, if not move towards marriage. Committed Relationship would be an enhanced form of betrothal that would give couples a degree of legal security as well as status through public recognition of their relationship. Now that marriage has become an extended process, Committed Relationship could become a recognised precursor to the wedding. Its potential value is underlined by the time taken to arrange weddings and because couples are likely to start a family before marrying. It is argued that the introduction of Committed Relationship is preferable the Law Commission proposal

to give couples automatic rights solely on the basis of length of time they have lived together. It could be adapted to celebration in either a religious or civil context.

The proposal for Committed Relationship is supported by an additional wedding service, 'Celebrated Relationship', that would embrace the full theology of marriage but offer a low-cost, low-key alternative to the full 'white' church wedding. The intention is to encourage couples who would normally opt for a civil wedding to consider marrying in church.

Relationships are always changing in response to circumstances and I have identified two developments that should be of concern to the church. The first is cohabiting singleness, where (mostly) men abrogate their responsibilities in favour of seeking sexual adventure. This is partly addressed by the church encouraging greater responsibility and stability in all relationships. The second is the emergence of intentional single parentage that moves relationships even further away from marriage than does cohabitation. The recommendation is that that both issues be addressed both sociologically and theologically.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

The aims of this thesis were twofold, firstly to enable the church to be more accepting of cohabitation within both its theology and pastoral practice and secondly, to find ways of encouraging greater integrity, faithfulness and stability in all marriage-like heterosexual relationships. My thesis focuses on contemporary Britain, approaching the subject within a specifically Christian context. Cohabitation has been found to include a wide range of attitudes from short-term liaisons to relatively stable long-term relationships that are outwardly indistinguishable from marriage. However, in contemporary society, there is a growing view that any relationship should be endured only for as long as it is needed.

The work is justified through a presentation of empirical observation and evidence supported by statistical data that demonstrate a rising trend away from marriage towards cohabitation, predicted to continue for the foreseeable future. Currently, cohabitation accounts for about one quarter of never-married adult males and one third of never-married adult females. The statistics also revealed that within marriage itself, the trend is towards greater numbers of civil marriages rather than marriage with a church/religious ceremony.

Two important and original contributions to this study are the surveys of clergy and congregations, representing the main Christian denominations in Harrogate. Within the church family, clergy and congregations, universally, regard Christian marriage as the ideal and are concerned that cohabitation should not be presented as normative by the church. There is a limited readiness to accept cohabitating couples within the church family, but the general view is that they should be encouraged towards marriage. The reality is that for many couples, this may not be appropriate in the short-term, whether for social or economic reasons. From clergy and congregations, there is a greater acceptance of cohabitation when a couple are known to be preparing for marriage than if they are cohabiting with no such intention (assuming they are free to do so). Where they are divided is whether cohabitation is an effective preparation for marriage.

Support was forthcoming from both clergy and congregations that the church should be concerned to find ways of encouraging greater stability in all relationships. In the first instance, there is a need for the strengthening of marriage preparation for couples marrying in church, exploring explore issues such as finance, long-term health and attitudes to children and families and stressing the development of friendship for long-term support. The two surveys confirmed that only rarely, are couples coming for church marriage not already living together: clergy tend to assume they have already addressed all the issues of living together, though the view of congregations was that this is not necessarily the case.

An important omission by the church is to fail to recognise the likelihood that the partners may have had separate previous and possibly equally serious relationships. Although clergy routinely address the situation where one or other partner has been divorced, there is a lack of appreciation that the resolution of previous cohabiting relationships may have similar consequences for their forthcoming marriage.

A review of the development of the marriage tradition from both theological and social perspectives explored how cohabitation may exhibit a different mentality to church marriage, showing some convergence with recent developments in civil marriage, particularly in USA. Cohabitation in contemporary Britain perpetuates a long history of informal, secular marriage-like relationships of which common law marriage is a prime example, but with significant differences that reflect changing social attitudes. The lifestyles and attitudes that characterise cohabitation follow closely ideas that have emanated post-Enlightenment in a desire to remove what were perceived to be institutionalised inequalities between men and women. Cohabitation may be understood in terms of a greater value placed on individual fulfilment together with many couples reluctant to embark on a lifetime commitment to each other.

Where couples do marry, the marriage process has become much more extended, with priority given to first establishing home and family. The wedding is now the final stage that confirms their intentions and commitment and establishes their kinship relationships. The creation of kinship is advanced as one of the differences between cohabitation and marriage, given that the two lifestyles may share a commonality of ethical and other values.

Cohabitation presents a challenge to the marriage tradition through its informality and ability to make its own rules. From a theological perspective, an exegesis of the creation narratives that have been closely allied to marriage and underpin some of the core values of the marriage tradition enables cohabitation to be partially understood in terms of the relationship values it engenders. Nevertheless, as a marriage-like relationship, it is found to be incomplete, particularly through the absence of formal statements of commitment and its failure to recognise its obligations to family and society.

Sociological models have been developed to show how marriage and cohabitation interact with each other to reinforce society. A major difference between marriage and cohabitation revealed is that marriage generates a strongly linked network that helps bind society but with cohabitation, the cohesive forces are much reduced: as the number of cohabiting couples rises relative to those who are married, the whole structure is weakened.

An important outcome contributing to our understanding of the relationship between cohabitation and marriage is the development of a theology of friendship that links different styles of relationship into a unified structure. I argue the particular contribution of friendship is to underpin the long-term stability of marriage and other relationships. A Friendship Mapping Chart is devised to show how relationships may develop from an uncommitted encounter through to sacramental marriage, with or without cohabitation and some typical relationship-trajectories are plotted.

With the decline of the proportion of church marriages relative to civil marriages, traditional marriage preparation does not now reach the majority of couples marrying in Register Offices or other licensed locations. There are proposals emanating from my conversations with respondents to the surveys for the church to reach out to all couples, whether single, cohabiting or preparing for church or civil marriage, to explain the Christian ethics of marriage through joint church-secular initiatives. It is concluded that an expanded scheme of relationship education is needed, possibly serviced jointly by the church and secular agencies, to make couples more aware of their expectations and responsibilities. This would include a basic marriage preparation guidance package to all wedding candidates, civil and church, including better use of events such as National Marriage Week, maintaining a church presence

at secular wedding exhibitions to explain Christian views on marriage, and joint church-secular marriage preparation courses.

Proposals from elsewhere for the reintroduction of a modernised betrothal liturgy to help cohabiting couples to integrate more fully into the church family are supported, though with reservations. My response is to introduce two new liturgies to meet the needs of couples wishing to enhance their status and make their relationships legally more secure. The first is to extend and adapt the concept of betrothal to form a new liturgy of 'Committed Relationship'. It parallels Civil Partnership but is specifically for heterosexual couples. It would give limited legal security, less than that for marriage but sufficient to sustain a potentially enduring relationship. In a church environment, it would be presented as an enhancement of betrothal, with the emphasis on commitment and understanding of the Christian ethics of marriage. A civil form Committed Relationship would be celebrated in a Register Office (or licensed premises) without any religious significance. In both cases, the partners would sign a Schedule that would confirm their limited legal benefits but not entitle them to regard themselves as married. The second is for the introduction of a new marriage liturgy called 'Celebrated Relationship'. This would parallel traditional church marriage, presenting a new, modern image to appeal to couples who might not ordinarily consider marrying in church. The advantage is that it would enable the church to extend its pastoral outreach to couples, particularly those outside the worshipping community without it having to compromise its theology on marriage.

In a climate of continuously changing lifestyles, I draw attention to two particular issues now developing that have both theological and social ramifications. Firstly, there is cohabiting singleness: as age at marriage is rising, there is increasing scope for serial short-term cohabiting or semi-cohabiting relationships, with the potential for creating instability in society. The second is that of intentional single parentage, mothers electing to have babies but excluding the father from the relationship and any responsibility for nurture, care and support for the child. This moves relationships even further from the biblical norm for families than does cohabitation as well as severely distorting gender roles and responsibilities. Single parentage may also be exacerbated by easy divorce. Single parentage has potential for the creation of a rising population of unattached males with minimal familial ties needing to find other ways of expending their natural urges. In this context, there is an obvious link with

cohabiting singleness. There is a role for the church, with its vast experience of managing marriage and family relationships, to address these issues as part of its mission and outreach to society.

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Appendix I

Profile of Harrogate.

The following data are taken from statistics prepared by Harrogate Borough Council's Economic Development Unit, www.harrogate.gov.uk, together with data from other local authority offices such as District Valuation Offices and National Census returns. Most statistics are for the Harrogate District that includes a large rural area. This makes a relatively small contribution to the factors extracted below.

Harrogate District covers an area of over 500 square miles, including the towns of Harrogate, Knaresborough, Ripon and Boroughbridge plus a large number of villages. In preparing this overview, where possible, attention has focussed on the area that defines where most of the cohabitation survey has been conducted.

The general observation is that the statistics bear out the reputation of Harrogate as a well-heeled town with an ageing population though inevitably this generalisation hides variations that render the surveys reported in Chapters 4 and 5 much more significant for a wider audience.

1 Population Profile.

The population of the Harrogate District, according to the 2001 Census count, is 151,339 of which 48.8% are female and 51.2% are male.. According to Population Projections for the Yorkshire & Humber Region (ONS 1996-2001), the Harrogate District is expected to experience a 13% increase in population over a 25-year period culminating in a total population of 166,000 by 2021. This is the highest projected increase in the region. The current population of Harrogate Town covered by the survey is 76016.

2. Age Profile

A closer look at the age group split for the Harrogate District (according to the 2001 Census results) illustrates that the District is well below the national population averages in age groups between 20 and 35 but higher than the national average in all 50+ age groups, illustrated in the following table :-

Age years	Harrogate District %	England and Wales %
<16	19.3	20.2
16 – 19	5.0	4.9
20 – 29	10.1	12.6
30 – 59	42.8	41.5
60 – 74	14.2	13.3
>75	8.5	7.6

The average age for the population is 40.2 yrs for Harrogate District compared with 38.6 yrs for England and Wales, illustrated by the higher proportions than the national averages in the older age groups.

3. Marital Status

The following figures are for Harrogate District and are compared with the national average for England and Wales.

Status	Harrogate District %	England and Wales %
Single (never married)	25.4	30.4
Married/ remarried	55.7	50.9
Separated	2.1	2.4
Divorced	8.2	8.2
Widowed	8.5	8.4

Whereas the percentages separated, divorced and widowed are close to the averages for England and Wales, there is a significantly higher proportion married and correspondingly lower proportion single. What is not determined is the proportion of the unmarried population who are cohabiting.

4. Ethnic Profile

The overwhelming majority of the population in Harrogate District, 98.4%, is classed as white: that includes less than 1% white Irish. The corresponding figure for England and Wales is 90.9%. Those of mixed racial origin account for 0.7% (England and Wales, 1.3%), Asian or Asian British 0.2% (4.6%), Black or Black British 0.2% (2.1%) and Chinese and others, 0.4% (0.9%).

5. Religion

According to the 2001 Census, 79% of the population of Harrogate District are Christian, compared with 71.8% for England and Wales. The following table shows the distribution of religious orientation within the area :-

Religion	Harrogate District %	England and Wales %
Christian	79.0	71.8
Buddhist	0.2	0.3
Hindu	0.1	1.1
Jewish	0.2	0.5
Muslim	0.2	3.0
Sikh	0.0	0.3
Other religions	0.2	0.3
No religion	13.1	14.8
Not stated	7.0	7.7

5.1 Churches in Harrogate

The churches involved in the surveys are all contained within the town boundary, though this does not preclude some of the clergy having responsibility for smaller churches in the rural areas outside the town. Similarly, many congregations have members living outside the town boundary but worshipping within the town, in many cases, through having moved house but retaining a loyalty to their former congregation. The locations of the churches are shown in Fig. I(a).1 :-

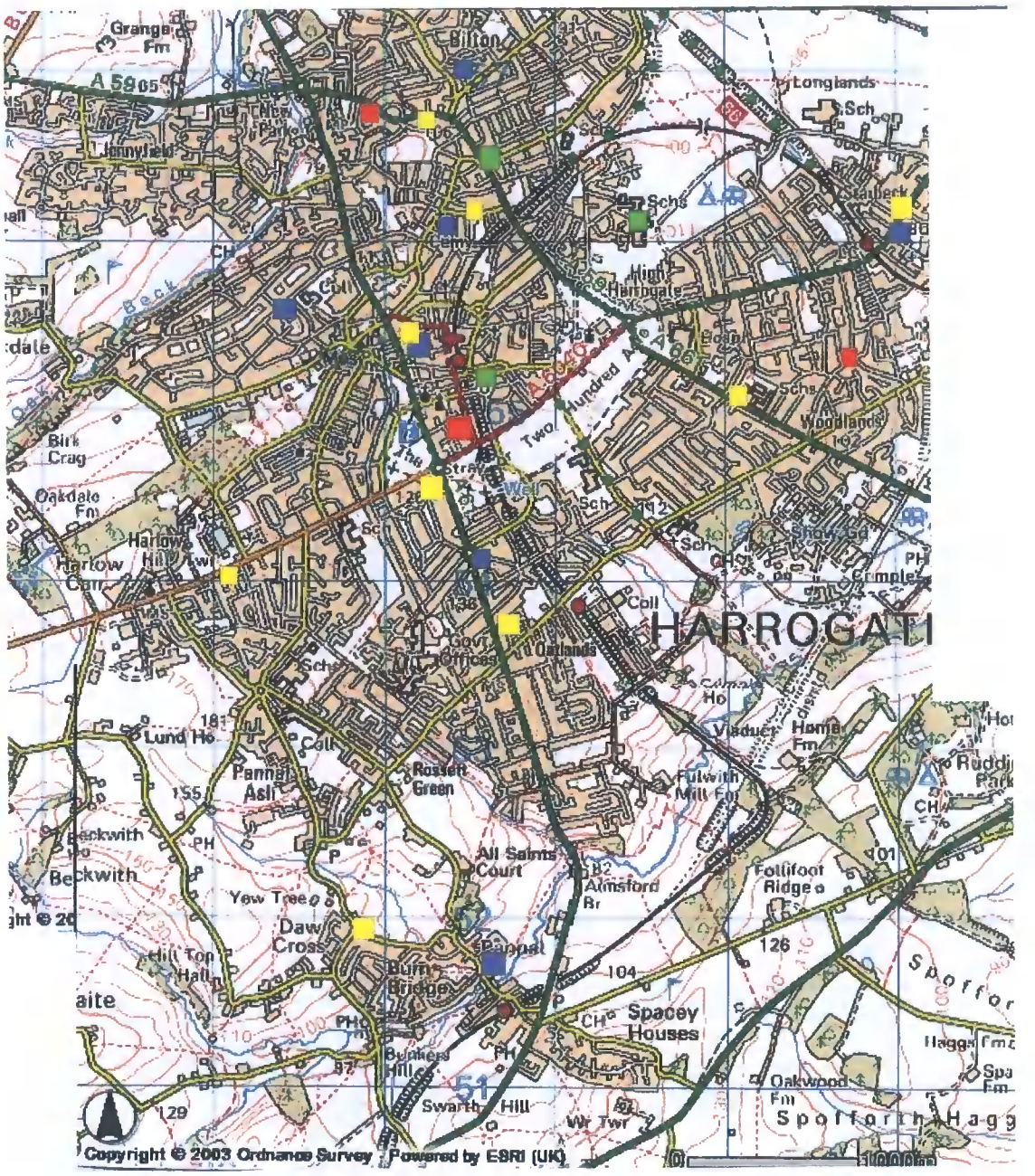


Fig. I.a.1 Locations of churches included in surveys.

Roman Catholic
Church of England
Methodist
Other Non-Conformist.

It is important to remember that not all of the churches, or clergy from those churches took part in both surveys. Also, a number of the clergy involved are retired or no longer resident in Harrogate. Nevertheless, the map shows the church/clergy centres to be well distributed through the town.

Appendix II

Clergy Survey Questionnaire

The initial approach was by telephone, to introduce myself and explain the purpose of the survey, identify the context in which the survey was being carried out and give assurances on the issue of confidentiality. The survey itself was accompanied by a covering letter that reiterated these points.

The fact that the survey was being carried out in my home town had the advantage that I knew many of the clergy personally and had met others on various ecumenical occasions.

The survey sent to the clergy is reproduced on the following four pages. It was designed to occupy two double sided A4 sheets.

COHABITATION AND PASTORAL CARE

It would be helpful if you could provide a brief personal profile: **All** information provided will remain confidential, **All** sources will be protected.

Name:

Age band and status:

Under 25. 26-40. 41-60. over 60.

Single. Married. Widow(er). Widow(er)/remarried. Divorced/single. Divorced/remarried. Cohabiting.

Church or Other Responsibility/ Denomination

Please describe your theological tradition

e.g. Anglo-catholic, evangelical etc.

==========

Sections 1 - 3 are designed to explore your attitude towards cohabitation as a lifestyle, its interaction with church, i.e. Christian marriage and how it impacts on church life. This is followed by an opportunity to add your general comments.

Instructions

The questions come in one of two forms.

1. Some require a response

YES, ALWAYS

NO, NEVER

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES.

Please tick the one nearest to your response. The third option invites you to expand your views, through a number of supplementary questions plus an opportunity to suggest other factors.

2. Other questions invite your response to a given statement. Please read the question, and indicate as follows:-

If you Agree Strongly, ring ..... AS A NC D DS

If you Agree, ring ..... AS A NC D DS

If you are Not Certain, ring ..... AS A NC D DS

If you Disagree, ring ..... AS A NC D DS

If you Disagree Strongly, ring ..... AS A NC D DS

1. Cohabitation and Lifestyle

Cohabitation as an alternative lifestyle to marriage has become established throughout society both inside and outside the church community. Though cohabitation invokes no formal commitments, the motivations and intentions to form a relationship may well resemble those found in marriage. The relationship itself may be as loving and caring as any marriage, maybe even more so, with children nurtured with a comparable level of love, care and devotion. At the same time, the lack of formality allows the possibility of easy exit, serial relationships, disparate family groupings and irregular liaisons that would not be permitted within marriage.

Marriage is, by tradition, one of the cornerstones of society. It transcends religious and cultural boundaries as the way by which couples are required to live, established through a pattern of mating, developing from friendship and courtship through to a wedding, sharing a home and sexual consummation. Christianity, in common with many cultures, attributes certain core values to marriage such as faithfulness, mutuality and monogamy plus an intent to a lifetime commitment.

For Christian marriage to be confirmed, it requires the consent of society as well as the couple themselves, expressed through their vows and an affirmation that they are not prevented from marrying through, for example, a close or pre-existing relationship.

The aim of this section is to test the readiness of clergy of different denominations to accept that many people, including confirmed Christians, now choose to live together in a conjugal life-style outside of marriage with different levels of commitment. The relationship may be short term with or without an intention to marry, or be an established, preferred long-term lifestyle with no intention to marry. Furthermore, it is not only young people who cohabit, but so do many older people, often as divorcees or widow(er)s.

Would you please indicate your personal response to the following questions :-

1.1 Is cohabitation without an intention to marry an acceptable alternative lifestyle to marriage?

YES, ALWAYS.

NO, NEVER.

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES.

If your answer is 'SOMETIMES', which of these circumstances would be relevant?

a) Length of the relationship.

If yes, how long before a relationship becomes acceptable?

b) Stability of the relationship.

If yes, how do you judge?

c) Children .

If yes, what difference does it matter that they may not be from the current relationship?

d) Other dependants.

e) One of the partners is not free to marry.

f) Other – please expand.

1.2 Is cohabitation accompanied by a commitment to marry acceptable?

YES, ALWAYS.

NO, NEVER.

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES. – please expand.

1.3 Is a non-adulterous conjugal relationship outside marriage always sinful?

YES, ALWAYS.

NO, NEVER.

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES.

If your answer is SOMETIMES' are you able to suggest circumstances where it is acceptable for sexual relations to be conducted outside of marriage?

Would you please respond to the following statements :-

1.4 It is unrealistic to anticipate a lifetime relationship in the 21st century. AS A NC D DS

1.5 Serial relationships are more appropriate to living in the 21st century. AS A NC D DS

1.6 It is acceptable for a couple to define their own rules for their relationship. AS A NC D DS

1.7 Cohabitation is an attempt to achieve greater control over one's relationship. AS A NC D DS

1.8 It is acceptable that a relationship may be formed without third party approval. AS A NC D DS

1.9 Cohabitation reflects a greater equality between men and women. AS A NC D DS

1.10 Cohabitation reflects a changing value placed on intimate relationships. AS A NC D DS

1.11 Cohabitation is a response to the fact that the risk of accidental or unwanted pregnancy is now minimal. AS A NC D DS

1.12 Sexual activity should be confined to marriage. AS A NC D DS

1.13 Marriage is primarily a commitment to mutuality and faithfulness. AS A NC D DS

1.14 A happy short-term relationship is better than being locked into an unsatisfactory marriage. AS A NC D DS

2. Cohabitation and Church Marriage

Couples presenting themselves for marriage in church commonly share the same address, implying that they have already formed a marriage-like relationship ahead of their wedding. In many cases, the couple will have made a conscious decision to marry before cohabiting. In other cases, the decision to cohabit comes first and only later do the couple 'drift' into marriage. It may also happen that there is an appeal to the idea of marriage, but no commitment until the couple have decided they are compatible through some sort of 'trial marriage'.

The marriage liturgy declares the purposes of marriage: in many liturgies, mutuality takes precedence over procreation and containment of sexual activity within the marriage. Society as a whole seems to place a much higher value on getting the sexual relationship right, expecting that mutuality and other benefits from the relationship will automatically devolve.

Furthermore, a couple that has remained apart may wonder what is the value of marriage if all of its tangible benefits can be enjoyed without the formality and expense of a wedding. Both may be prepared to defend their own chosen approach to marriage. This section is designed to draw out attitudes from within the church towards couples who have cohabited prior to marriage.

==========

Would you please respond by giving your personal response to the following statements :-

2.1 Church marriage should be 'on demand', provided there are no legal impediments. AS A NC D DS

2.2 Church marriage should be made more difficult. AS A NC D DS

2.3 Church marriage should be denied to a couple if you are not convinced they expect to fulfil the Christian ideals of marriage. AS A NC D DS

2.4 When faced with a couple currently cohabiting but seeking church marriage, the church should disregard their current situation. AS A NC D DS

2.5 Church marriages should be replaced by civil marriage plus a church blessing. AS A NC D DS

2.6 The church should encourage cohabitees to live apart for a period prior to the wedding. AS A NC D DS

If you agree that this is an appropriate action, then please say

a) how long should the separation should be.

b) whether the separation should be dependent on finding suitable accommodation.

c) whether the separation should be dependent on there being no children involved.

d) whether there other factors that would impede a separation? (please elaborate)

2.7 The church should strengthen Christian marriage preparation . AS A NC D DS

If you agree, please identify what you consider to be important factors.

2.8 The church should accept 'trial marriage' as part of marriage preparation. AS A NC D DS

2.9 The church should seek to strengthen marriage itself and discourage cohabitation. AS A NC D DS

If you agree, which of the following factors would you consider important?

a) A programme of post-marriage pastoral care. AS A NC D DS

b) Services of rededication of marriage vows. AS A NC D DS

c) Involvement of already married couples in marriage preparation. AS A NC D DS

d) Other (please expand)

2.10 The marriage liturgy should be expanded to accommodate couples already cohabiting. AS A NC D DS

2.11 A Betrothal liturgy should be introduced for couples who wish to 'marry' before making a final commitment. AS A NC D DS

==========

3 Cohabitation and Church Life

Cohabitation is not confined to couples outside the church: within any congregation, there are likely to be some worshippers who are cohabiting, though perhaps only one of partner may attend regularly. Neither should it be assumed that only young people cohabit: many older people, divorced, widowed or separated may prefer to cohabit than marry, often for companionship but for many other reasons such as to avoid complicated inheritance problems.

Would you please give your personal response to the following :-

3.1 A couple, part of the worshipping community, are known to be cohabiting. They are happy with the arrangement and have no intention to marry. Would you

a) accept them as they are? AS A NC D DS

b) bar them from worship? AS A NC D DS

c) bar them from communion? AS A NC D DS

d) bar them from holding office? AS A NC D DS

e) encourage them to marry? AS A NC D DS

3.2 A church going worshipper is cohabiting with a non-church going partner. Would you

a) accept the person as he/she is?	AS A NC D DS
b) bar the person from worship?	AS A NC D DS
c) bar the person from communion?	AS A NC D DS
d) bar the person from holding office?	AS A NC D DS
e) encourage the couple to marry?	AS A NC D DS

3.3 Should a couple within the church family known to be cohabiting be encouraged to marry?

YES, ALWAYS

NO, NEVER

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES - please elaborate.

3.4 If the couple refuses to marry, would you insist?

YES, ALWAYS

NO, NEVER

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES - please elaborate.

3.5 Any couple known to be cohabiting should be encouraged to marry.

YES, ALWAYS

NO, NEVER

SOMETIMES, DEPENDING ON CIRCUMSTANCES - please elaborate.

3.6 Would you give pastoral care to a cohabiting couple

a) as a couple?	AS A NC D DS
b) to both, but on an individual basis?	AS A NC D DS
c) to neither partner?	AS A NC D DS
d) according to circumstances?	AS A NC D DS

3.7 Would you accept children of a cohabiting couple into the congregation? AS A NC D DS

3.8 Would you baptise children of a couple known to be cohabiting? AS A NC D DS
(or, if appropriate, accept a cohabitee for Baptism)

3.9 The liturgy for Baptism should be expanded to accommodate cohabitation. AS A NC D DS

4. GENERAL

1. What do you see as the main pastoral problems when dealing with cohabitation?

2. Can you give examples where you feel pastoral care extended to a cohabiting couple has been successful?

3. My intention is to follow up this survey with something similar directed towards couples within the church family who are cohabiting, to find their experience and perception of how they think the church regards their situation. Would you be willing to assist in making an initial approach to them (but leave them to respond or not).

4. Please add any further observations or comments you wish to highlight.

Many thanks you for your help.

Appendix III

Congregation Survey Questionnaire

Cohabitation and Marriage: A Survey to Determine the Church's Response to Changing Social Attitudes.

Author: Peter Manning pvcmanning@lineone.net
01423 –508260

I am engaged in a theological research project into cohabitation as an alternative lifestyle to marriage and how the church is to reconcile its teaching on marriage with changing lifestyles and social attitudes. A majority of clergy in the Harrogate area have already responded to a questionnaire on how they react to cohabitation in the context of their pastoral role. I now wish to explore the views of congregations towards couples living together in marriage-like relationships that may or may not include a commitment to marry, particularly when they form part of the worshipping community.

At the outset,

let me say that your response to this survey is entirely voluntary and that all replies will be treated as strictly confidential. Furthermore, the views of any particular individual or congregation will not be revealed to the clergy of your own or any other church.

Declaration: This project is endorsed my Supervisor, Dr. Robert Song, Department of Theology, University of Durham, where I am registered as a part-time Research Student. Dr Song may be contacted on 0191-334-3958 or robert.song@durham.ac.uk.

Publication: I acknowledge that for many, this is a very sensitive area. Though the results of this project will eventually be published, all analyses will be presented anonymously on a denominational basis (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist etc.) and will not be traceable back to any particular congregation or individual.

The Survey: The survey is divided into four sections, with either 'tick boxes' or scale of agreement with given statements. Do not worry if certain questions do not accord with your situation or experience - just leave them blank. An envelope is provided for your reply and a collecting point in your church has been arranged – please see your Notice Sheet for details.

SECTION A – ABOUT YOURSELF

Please tick the appropriate boxes (and more than one where appropriate):

QA1. Which church do you normally attend:

[ ] Roman Catholic
[ ] Church of England
[ ] Methodist
[ ] URC
[ ] Baptist
[ ] Evangelical
[ ] Other. *(Please specify).*

QA2. How often do you attend worship?

[ ] More than once per month?
[ ] Once a month?
[ ] Special Occasions?

QA3. How would you describe your own religious beliefs?

[ ] Conservative
[ ] Evangelical
[ ] Liberal
[ ] Traditional Catholic
[ ] Modern Catholic
[ ] Liberal - evangelical.
[ ] No particular persuasion.

QA4. Marital Status, Sex and Age group.

[ ] Unmarried, no expectation of marriage.	[ ]	Male.	Age Group
[ ] Unmarried, expect to marry in future.	[ ]	Female.	[ ] 18 – 24.
[ ] Married.			[ ] 25 – 34.
[ ] Married, cohabited before marriage.			[ ] 35 – 44.
[ ] Remarried.			[ ] 45 - 60.
[ ] Widowed.			[ ] Over 60.
[ ] Separated.			
[ ] Divorced.			
[ ] Single parent.			
[ ] Cohabiting with a commitment to marry.			
[ ] Cohabiting with no current commitment to marry.			
[ ] Cohabiting but not free to marry.			

SECTION B – VIEWS ON MARRIAGE

QB1. Marriage involves a public declaration that two people love each other, intend to spend their whole lives together, taking responsibility for each other, their children and other family members.

Would you please indicate your strength of agreement with the following statements:

a) Marriage is God's preferred way for couples to live.	AS A NC D DS.*
b) In the C21, it is still realistic to make a lifetime commitment to one's partner.	AS A NC D DS.
c) The quality of the relationship is more important than being married.	AS A NC D DS.
d) Cohabitation is now part of the process of getting to know each other.	AS A NC D DS.
e) Marriage matters **only** if you have children.	AS A NC D DS.
f) Marriage is unnecessary in present day society.	AS A NC D DS.
g) In society today, it is important to have a relationship that can be dismantled with minimum formality.	AS A NC D DS.
h) There is too much emphasis on individual fulfilment to the detriment of marriage.	AS A NC D DS.
i) A partnership agreement should be introduced to give cohabiting couples more security.	AS A NC D DS.
j) Cohabitation undermines the church's teaching on marriage.	AS A NC D DS.

* AS – Agree Strongly; A – Agree; NC – Not Certain; D – Disagree; DS – Disagree Strongly.

QB2. If you are **single** with an expectation of marriage sometime in the future, would you be prepared to cohabit

a) after announcing your engagement?	[ ] Yes.	[ ] No.
b) after exchanging promises to marry, but not necessarily formally engaged?	[ ] Yes.	[ ] No.
c) in an open ended relationship without any or with only minimal commitments?	[ ] Yes.	[ ] No.

QB3. If you are **single** with an expectation of marriage sometime in the future, would you marry

a) because of family pressure?	[ ] Yes.	[ ] No.
b) because of peer pressure?	[ ] Yes.	[ ] No.
c) because marriage is part of your Christian beliefs?	[ ] Yes.	[ ] No.

d) Other reasons, such as . . .

SECTION C – COHABITATION and CHURCH LIFE.

QC1. a) As a Christian, do you personally accept couples who come to church but are living together as though married?

[ ] Yes [ ] No
[ ] Sometimes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

b) Are you more inclined to accept older people (e.g. widow(er)s, divorcees) living together as a married couple?

[ ] Yes [ ] No
[ ] Sometimes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

c) I consider another person's chosen lifestyle to be none of my business.
[ ] Yes. [ ] No.
[ ] It matters when . . .

QC2. Would you consider leaving for another church if a couple in your congregation were openly cohabiting

a) with a declared intention to marry? [ ] Yes [ ] No.
[ ] Yes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

b) with no declared intention to marry? [ ] Yes. [ ] No
[ ] Yes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

QC3. Do you believe that a person who is cohabiting could be elected to office within your church?
[ ] Yes [ ] No
[ ] Sometimes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

QC4. Do you believe that a person who is cohabiting could be an acceptable as a Sunday School teacher?
[ ] Yes [ ] No
[ ] Sometimes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

QC5. If a couple in the congregation are cohabiting with no intention to marry, should the church encourage them towards marriage?
[ ] Yes [ ] No
[ ] Sometimes, depending on circumstances, such as . . . .

QC6. If you are cohabiting or have cohabited, how were you received in your church?

a) Is/ was your status known to others in the congregation? [ ] Yes. [ ] No.

b) Do/did you feel able to conduct your relationship openly and without recrimination from the clergy? [ ] Yes. [ ] No.

c) Do/did you feel able to conduct your relationship openly and without recrimination from the congregation? [ ] Yes. [ ] No.

d) Would/did you consider moving to another congregation if the present one showed disapproval? [ ] Yes. [ ] No.

e) Are/were you treated as a couple rather than as two single people, albeit good friends? [ ] Yes. [ ] No.

SECTION D. – WAYS FORWARD

QD1. Cohabitation is contrary to the church's traditional stance on marriage. Is the church's teaching on marriage now out of date?

[ ] Yes. [ ] No. [ ] Not certain or don't know.

If YES, how do you think it should be modernised?

QD2. *Please indicate your agreement with the following:*

a) Cohabitation by avowed Christians weakens the church's authority in society.	AS A NC D DS.
b) The church should expand its teaching on marriage.	AS A NC D DS.
c) The church should find ways to encourage cohabitating couples move towards marriage.	AS A NC D DS.
d) The church should accept cohabitation only where there is a commitment to marry.	AS A NC D DS.
e) The church should just accept that cohabitation is part of today's lifestyle.	AS A NC D DS.

QD3. *Please indicate your agreement with the following:*

a) Each church should provide its own structured marriage preparation course.	AS A NC D DS.
b) Groups of churches should cooperate to provide marriage preparation and education courses.	AS A NC D DS.
c) Churches should introduce services of rededication of marriage vows?	AS A NC D DS.
d) Churches should attempt to reach out to non-church –going couples preparing for marriage through an expansion of marriage preparation courses?	AS A NC D DS.
e) Marriage preparation courses involving Relate or other outside agencies should be explored.	AS A NC D DS.
f) Churches should be more active in promoting National Marriage Week?	AS A NC D DS.
g) Churches should participate in marriage 'fairs' to promote the Christian ideals of marriage?	AS A NC D DS.

QD4. Have you any further comments on any aspect of this questionnaire?

I am aware that questionnaires often do not ask the 'right' questions: please feel free to append any further comments, on a separate sheet if necessary.

And Finally . . . .

I would very much like to 'interview' respondents who have strong views on cohabitation (for or against) and whether or not and how the church should modify its teaching on marriage.

Please respond,
[ ] Yes, I am willing to discuss these issues further, and await further contact to arrange a convenient time. You may contact me on . . . .

[ ] I would rather not be interviewed and consider the matter closed.

Many thanks indeed for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix IV

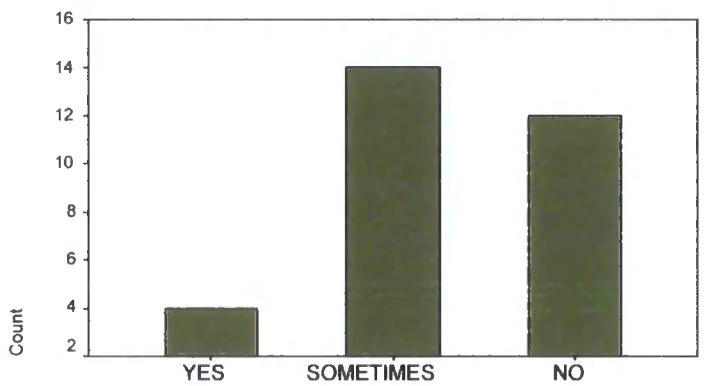
Clergy Attitudes to Cohabitation:

This appendix presents without comment, the findings from the Clergy Survey Questionnaire. The analytical methods together with explanations of the annotations are explained in Appendix I. The headings shown in bold are copied from the questionnaire (see Appendix I(b)).

1 Cohabitation and Lifestyle

Would you please indicate your personal response to the following questions :-

1.1 Is cohabitation without an intention to marry an acceptable alternative lifestyle to marriage?



1.1 Total Response.

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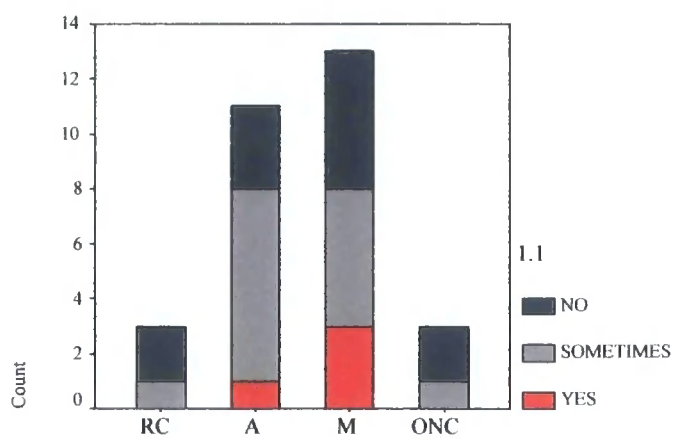
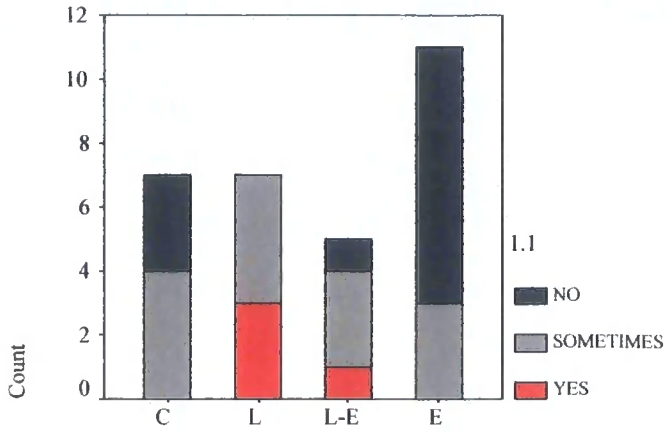
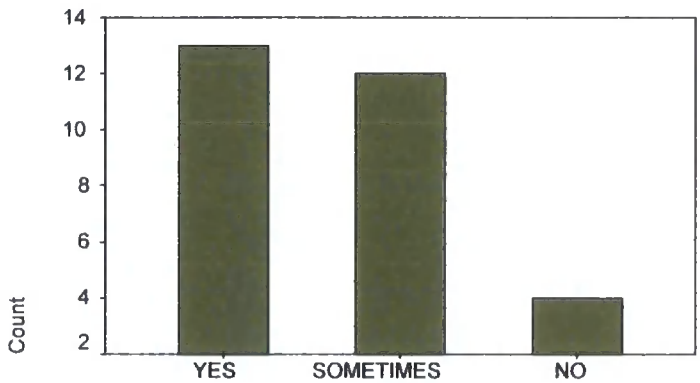




1.2 Is cohabitation accompanied by a commitment to marry acceptable?



1.2 Total Response.

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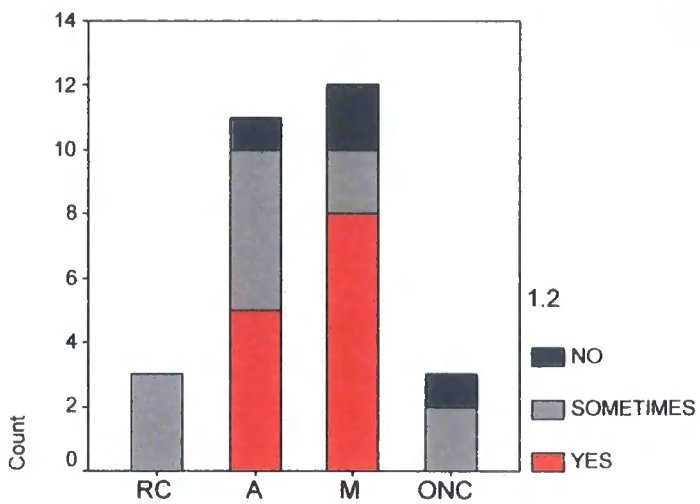
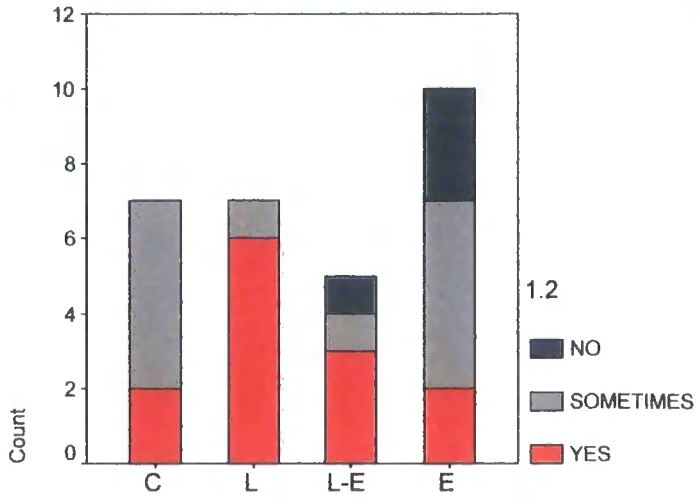
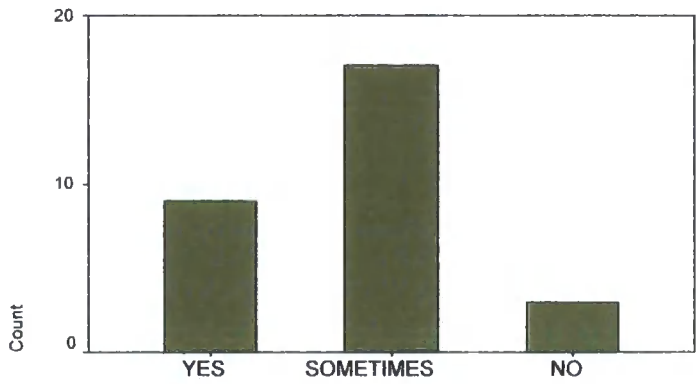




1.3 Is a non-adulterous conjugal relationship outside marriage always sinful?



1.3 Total Response.

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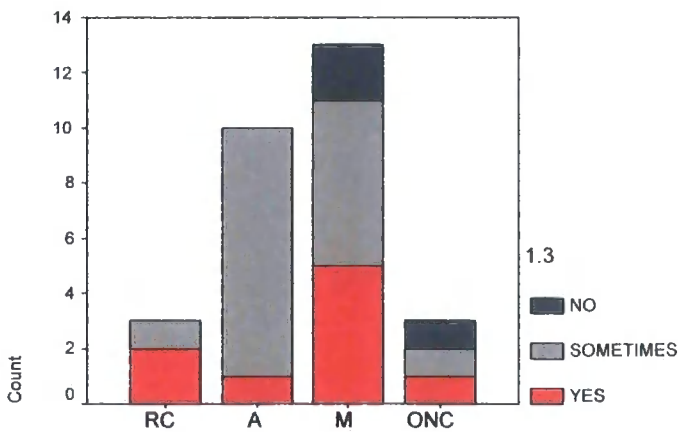
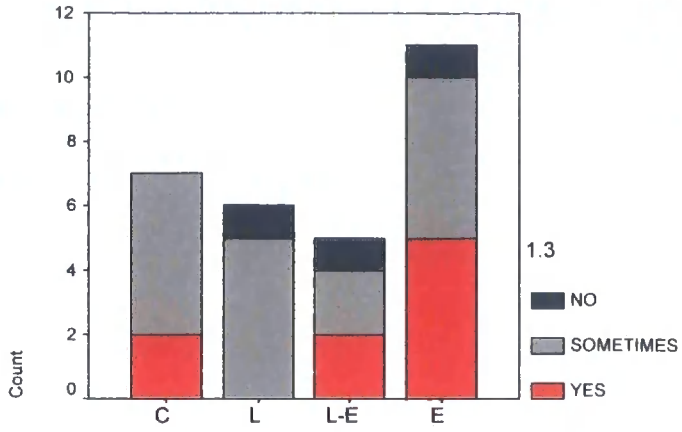
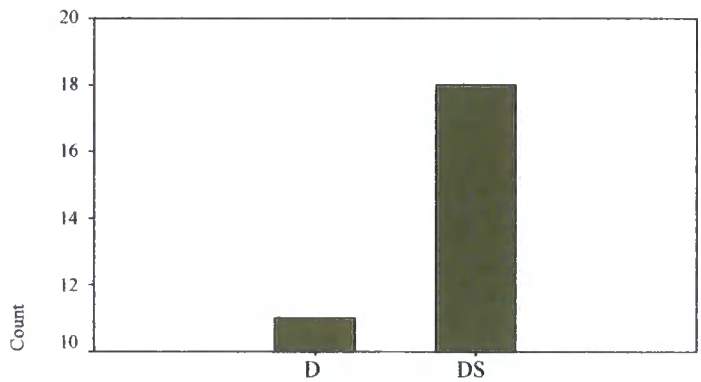




If your answer is SOMETIMES, are you able to suggest circumstances where it is acceptable for sexual relations to be conducted outside of marriage?

(The comments received are included in Chapter 6.)

1.4 It is unrealistic to anticipate a lifetime relationship in the 21st century.



1.4 Total Response.

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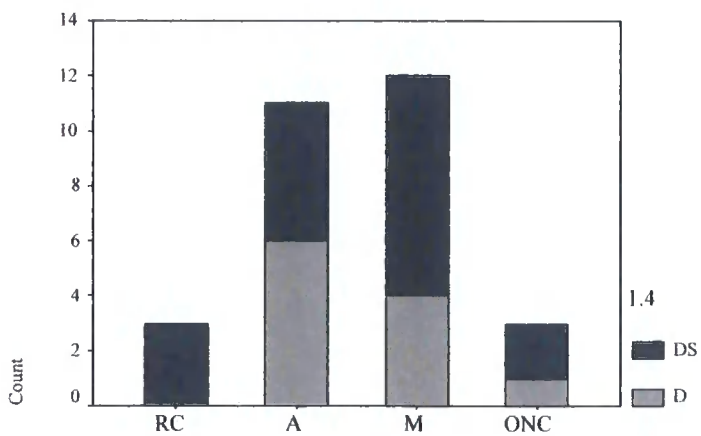
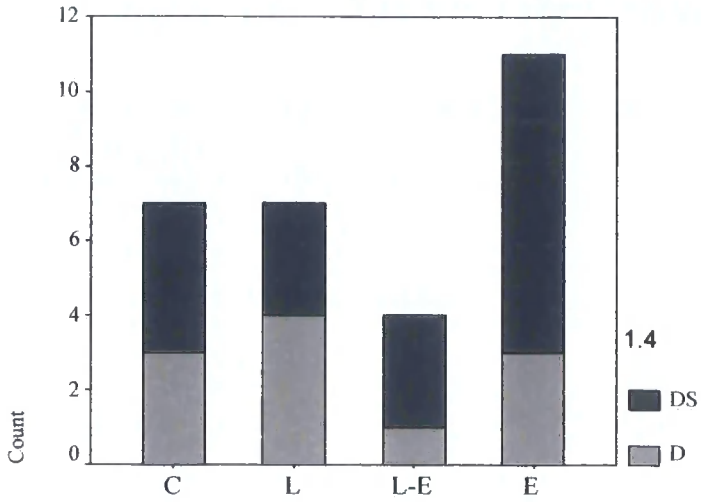
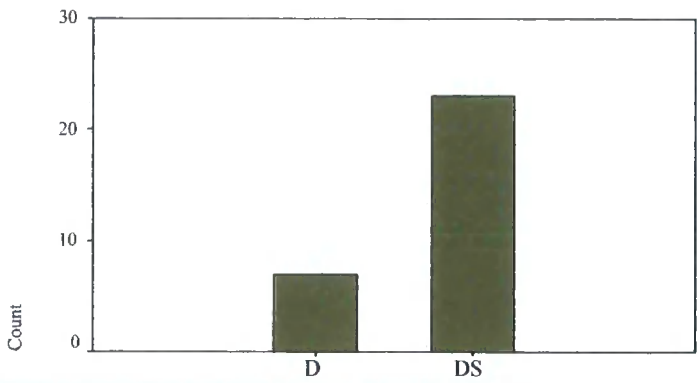




1.5 Serial relationships are more appropriate to living in the 21st century.



1.5 Total Response.

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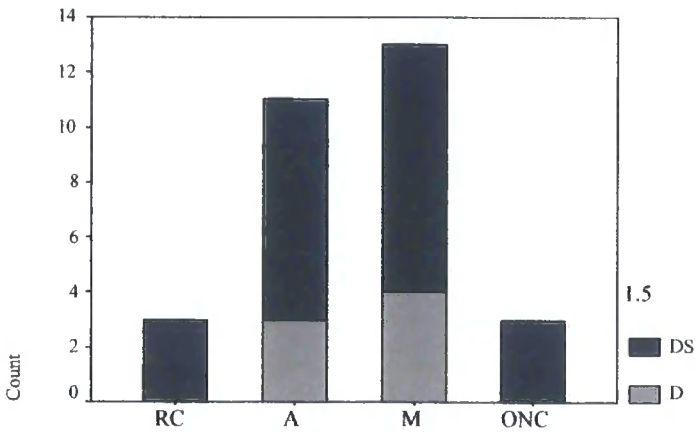
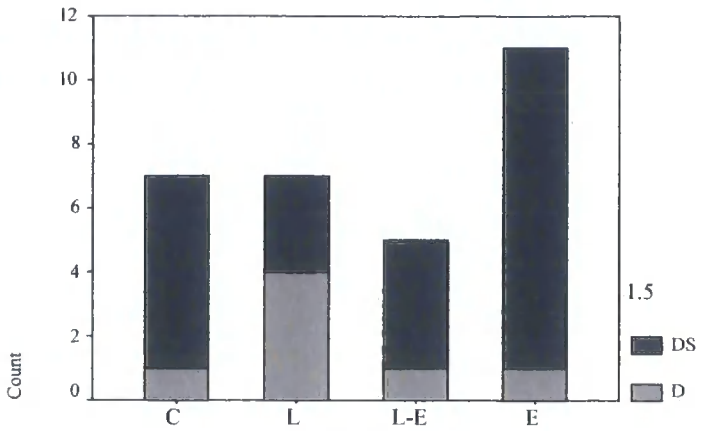
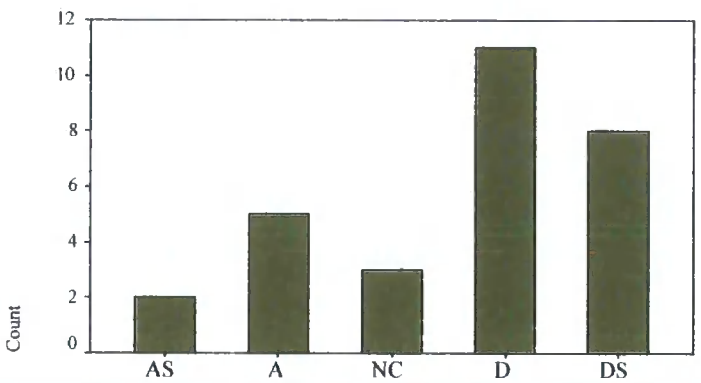




1.6 It is acceptable for a couple to define their own rules for their relationship



1.6 Total Response.

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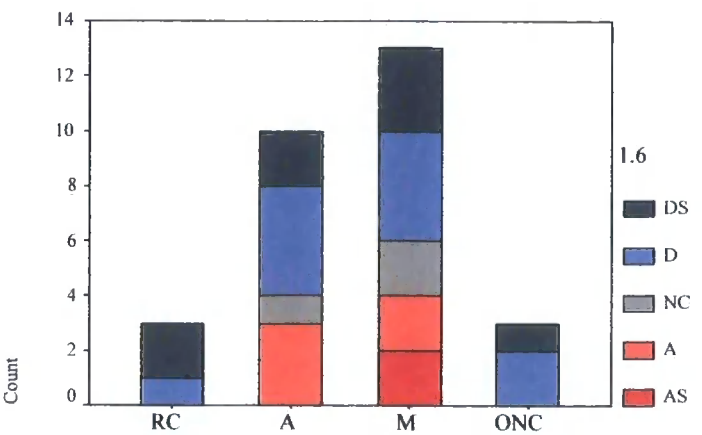
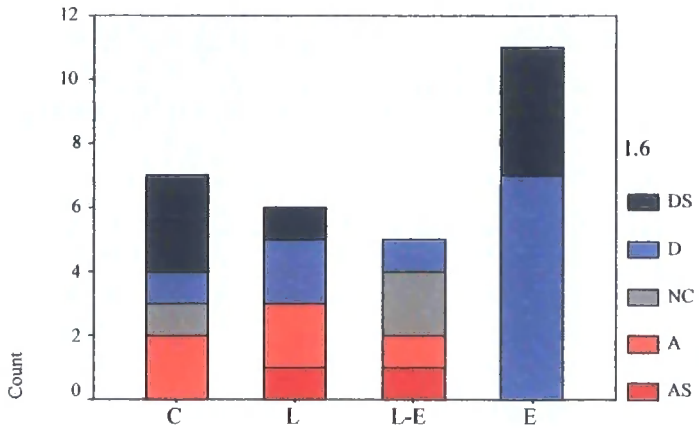
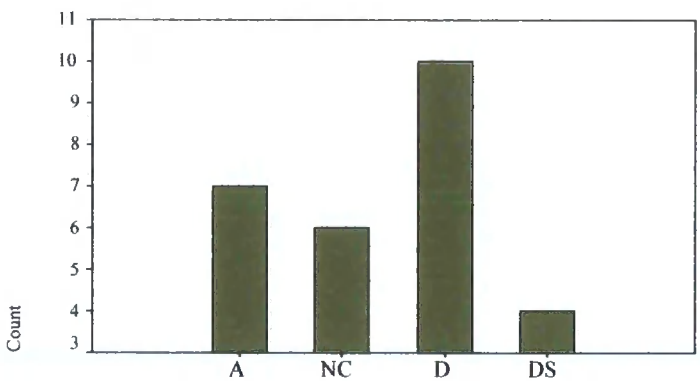




1.7 Cohabitation is an attempt to achieve greater control over one's relationship.



1.7 Total Response.

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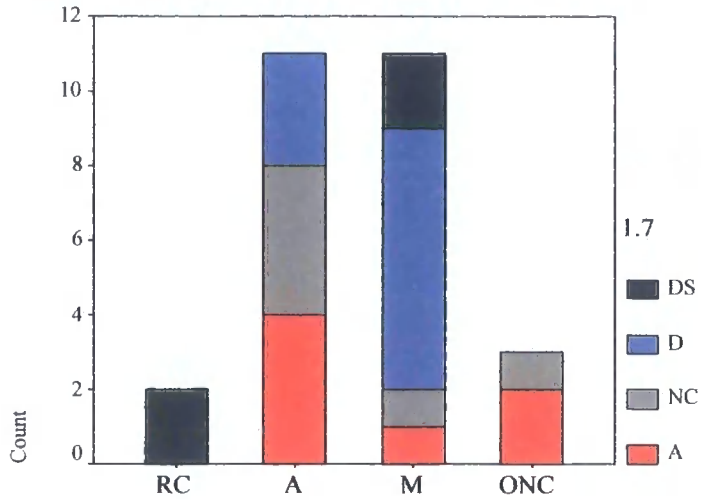
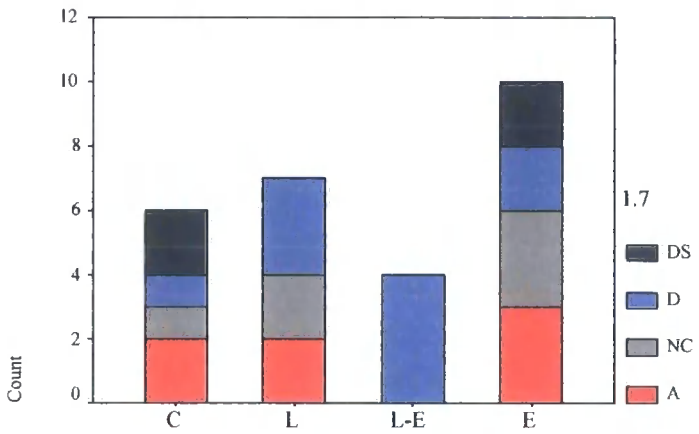
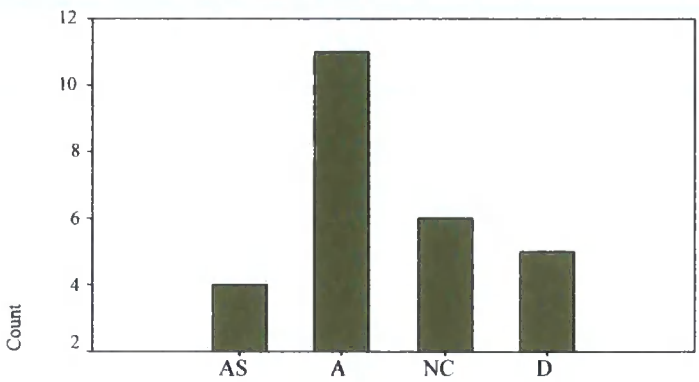


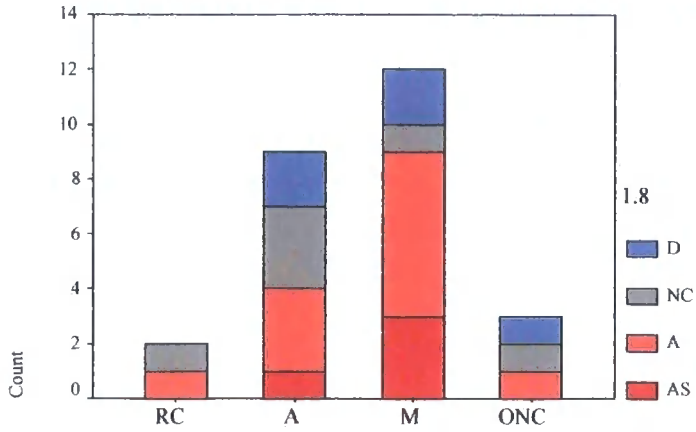


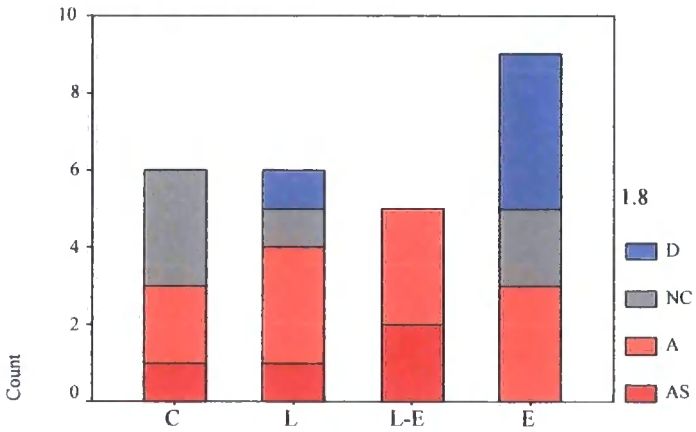
1.8 It is acceptable that a relationship may be formed without third party approval.



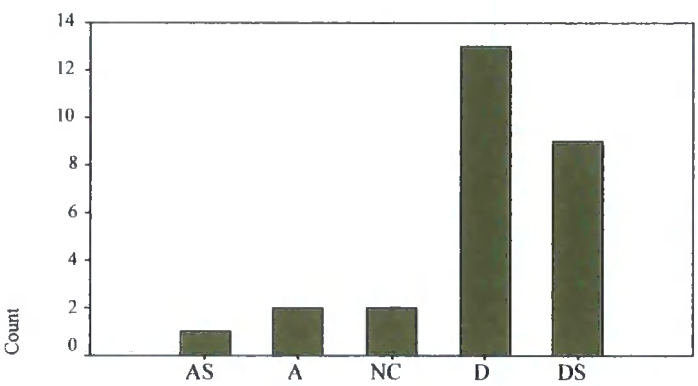
1.8 Total Response.

Sample size: 26.





1.9 Cohabitation reflects a greater equality between men and women.



1.9 Total Response.

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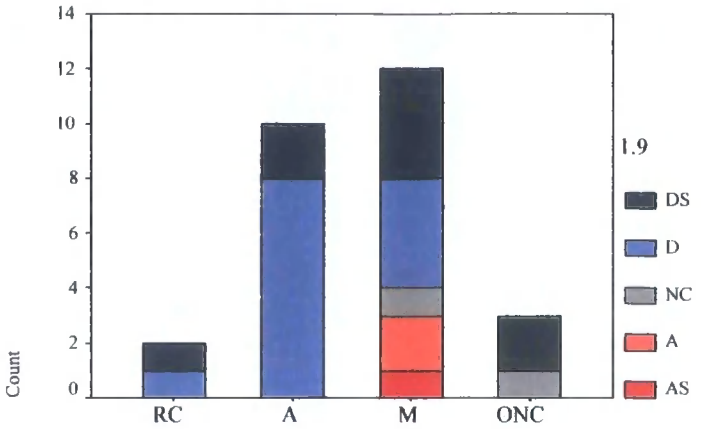
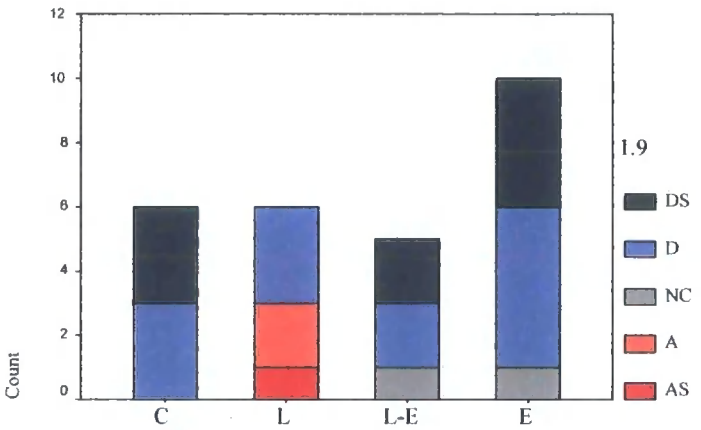
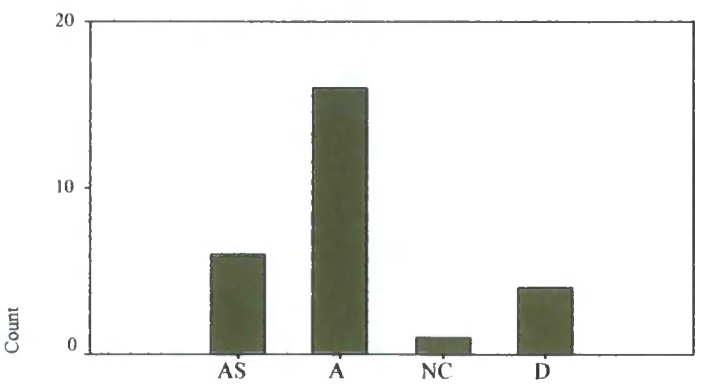




1.10 Cohabitation reflects a changing value placed on intimate relationships.



1.10 Total Response.

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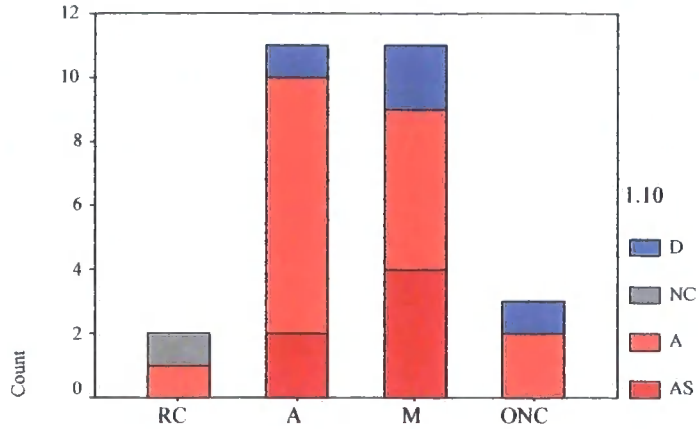
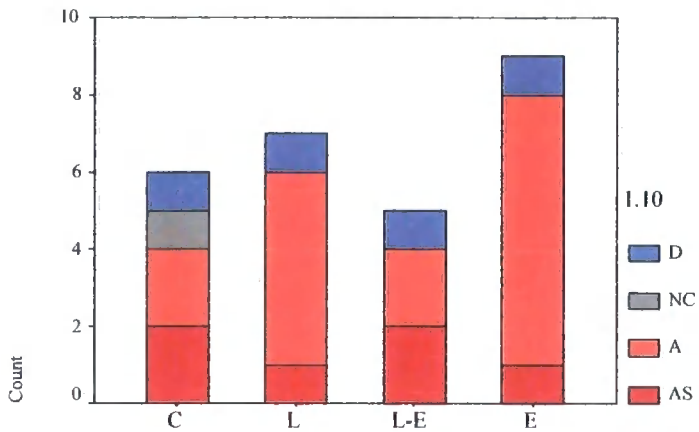
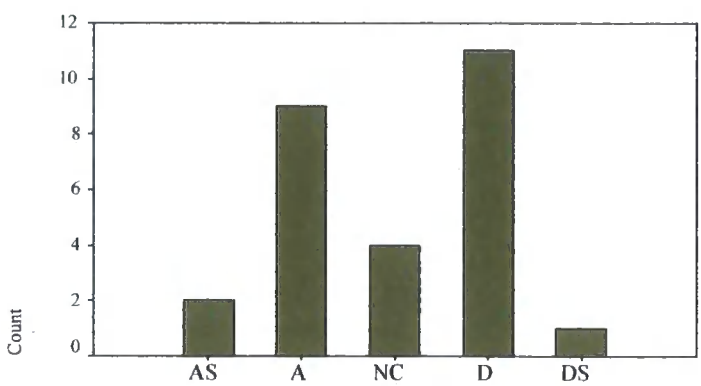




1.11 Cohabitation is a response to the fact that the risk of accidental or unwanted pregnancy is now minimal.



1.11 Total Response.

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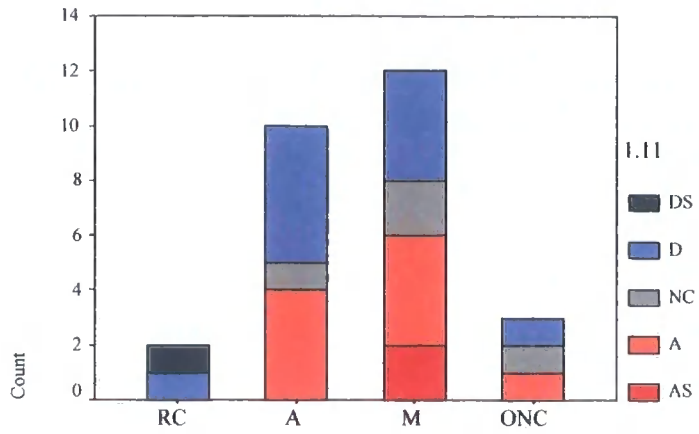
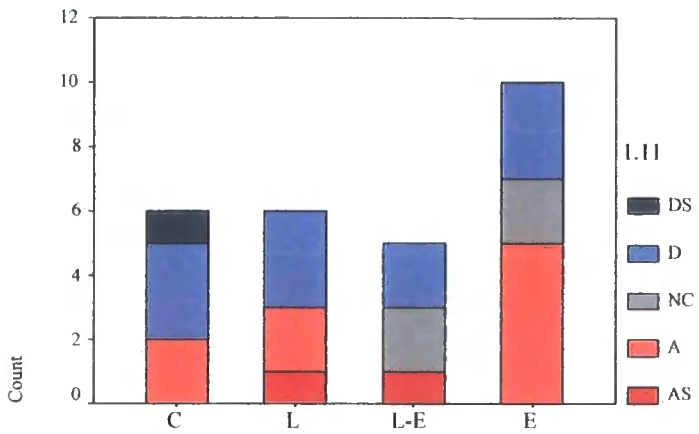
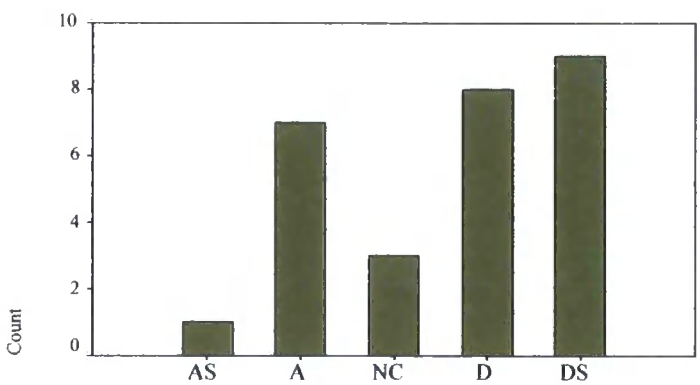




1.12 Sexual activity no longer needs to be confined to marriage.



1.12 Total Response.

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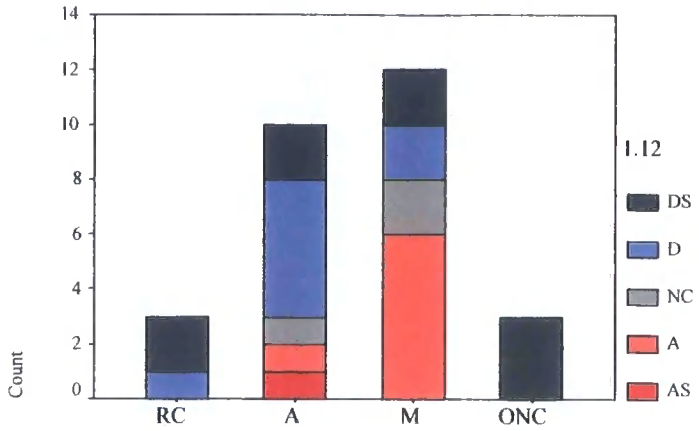
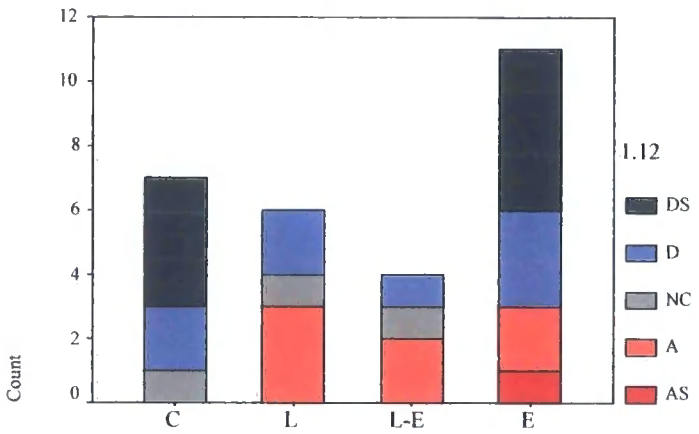
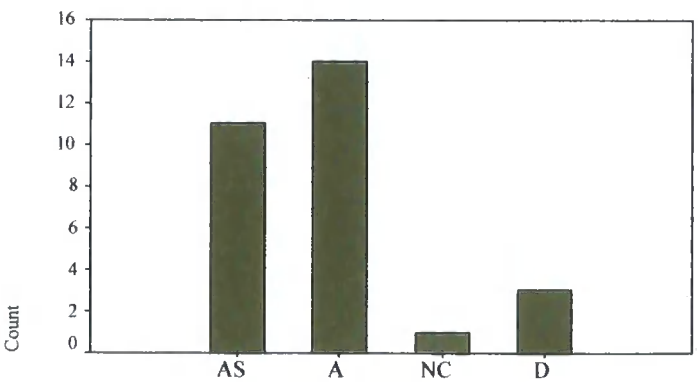




1.13 Marriage is primarily a commitment to mutuality and faithfulness



1.13 Total Response.

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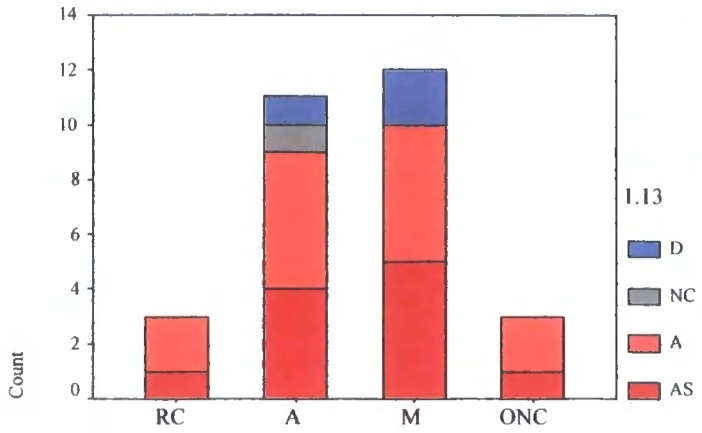
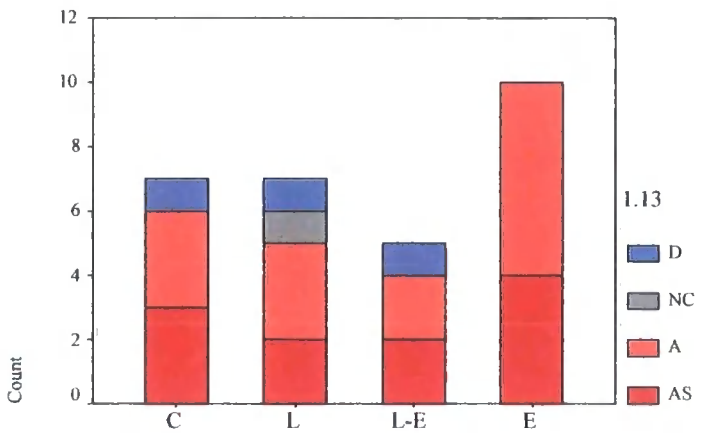
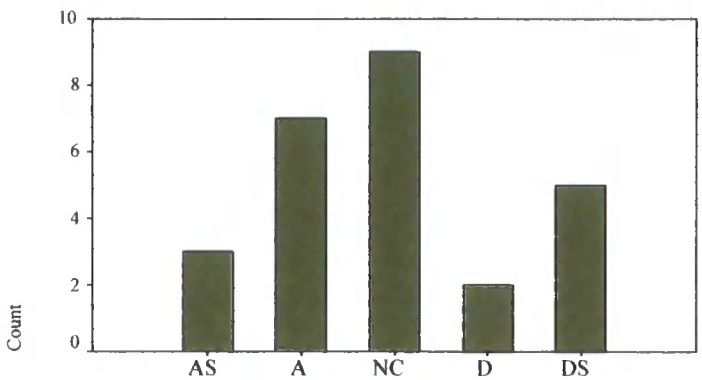




1.14 A happy short-term relationship is better than being locked into an unsatisfactory marriage.



1.14 Total Response.

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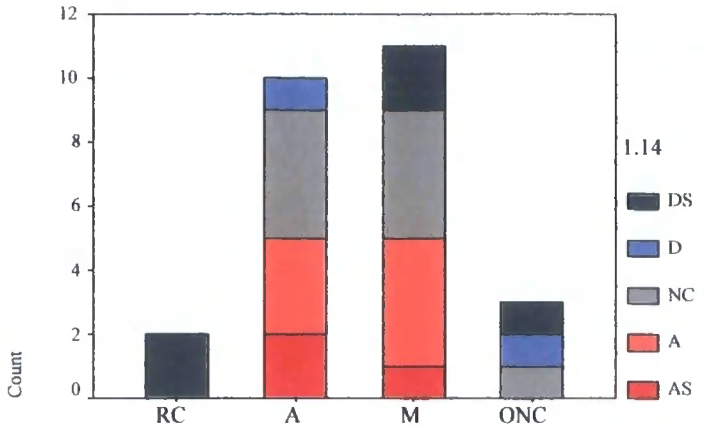
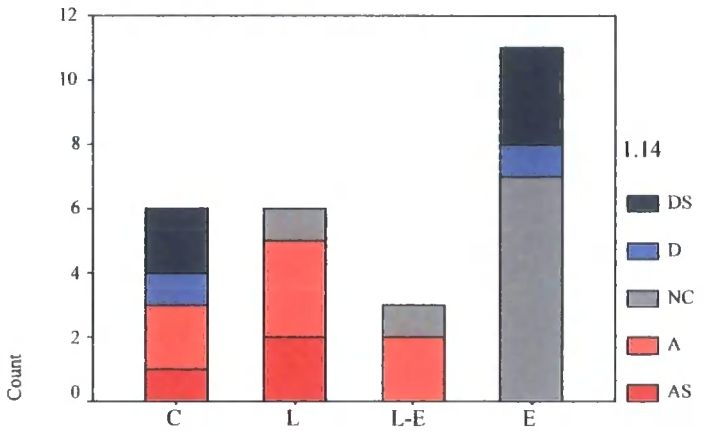
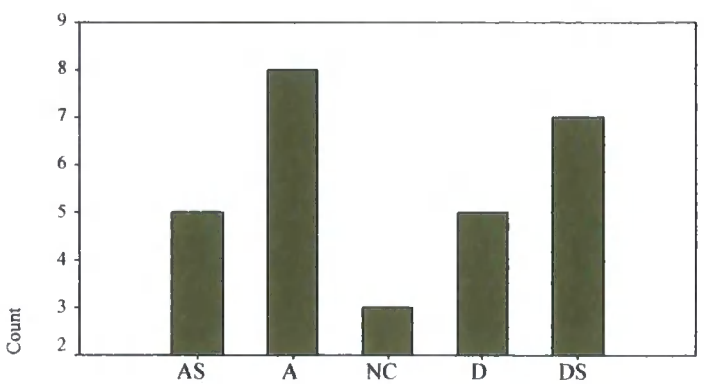




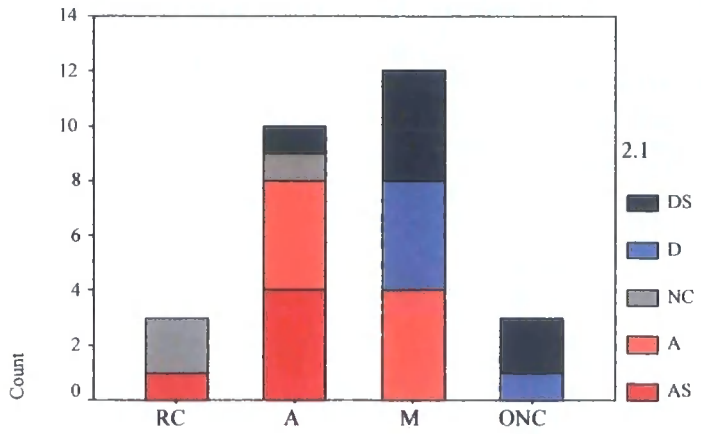
2. Cohabitation and Church Marriage

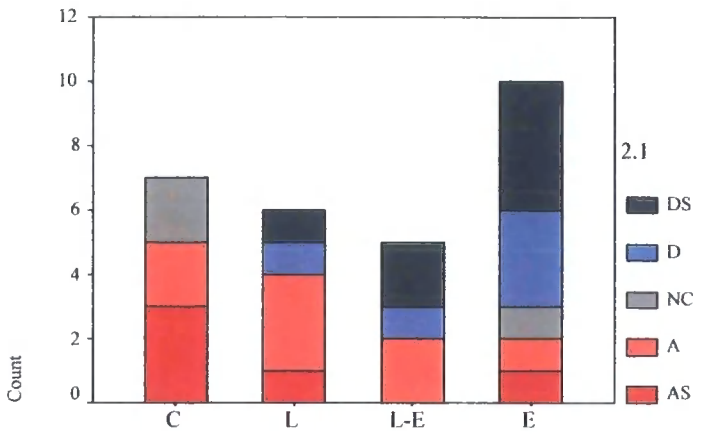
2.1 Church marriage should be 'on demand', provided there are no legal impediments.



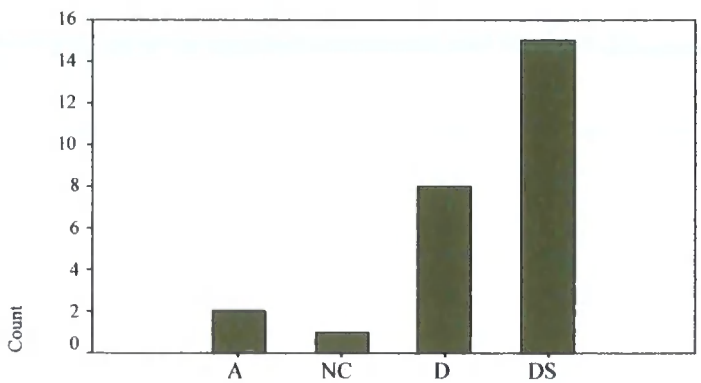
2.1 Total Response.

Sample size: 30.



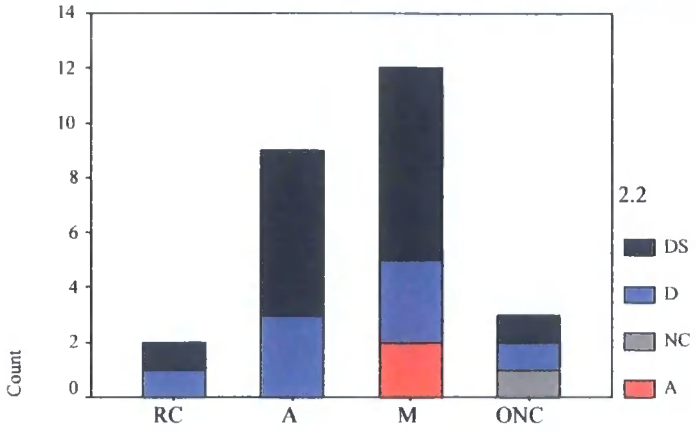


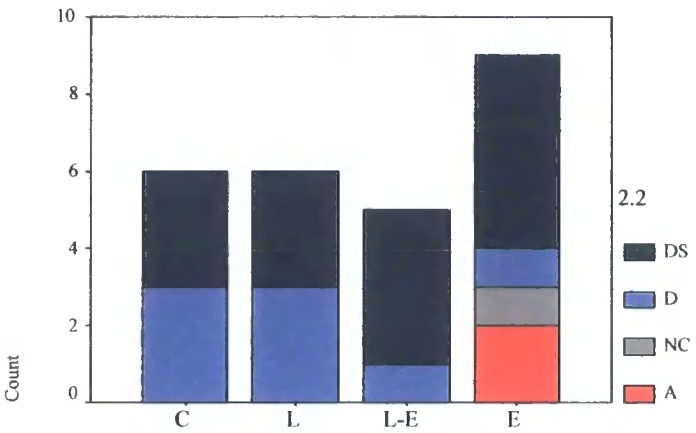
2.2 Church marriage should be made more difficult.



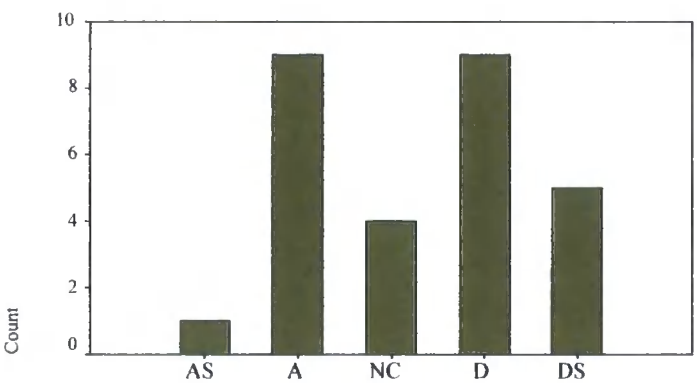
2.2 Total Response.

Sample size: 26.



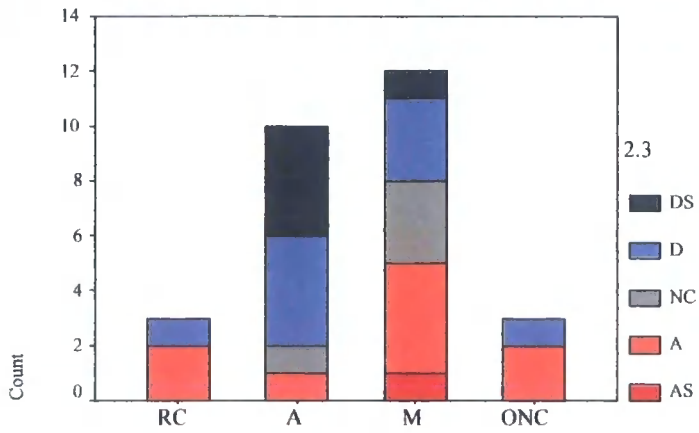


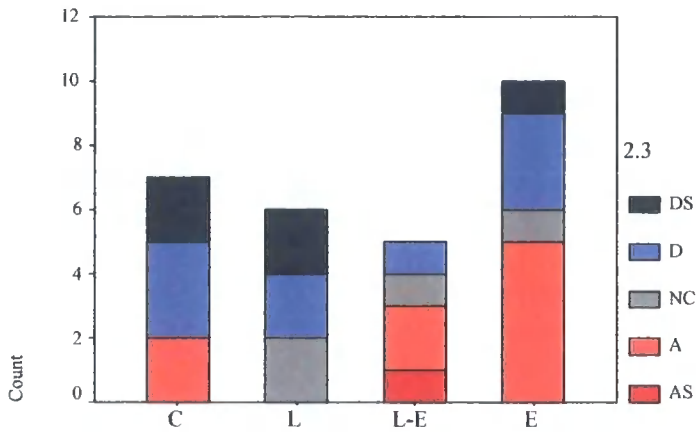
2.3 Church marriage should be denied to a couple if you are not convinced they expect to fulfil the Christian ideals of marriage.



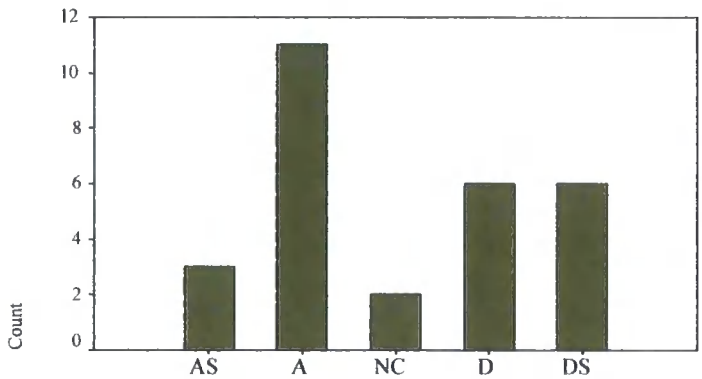
2.3 Total Response.

Sample size: 28.



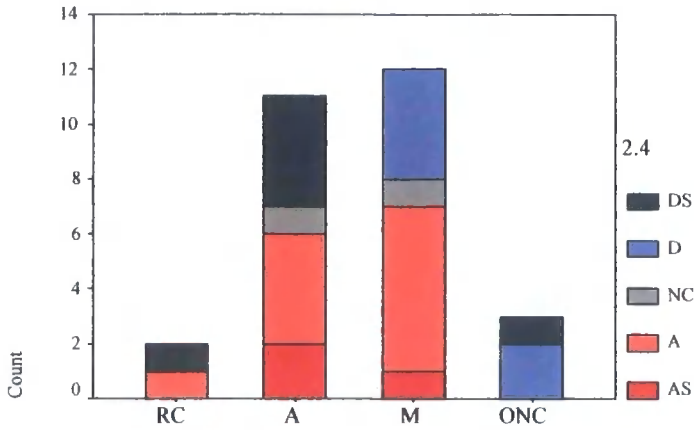


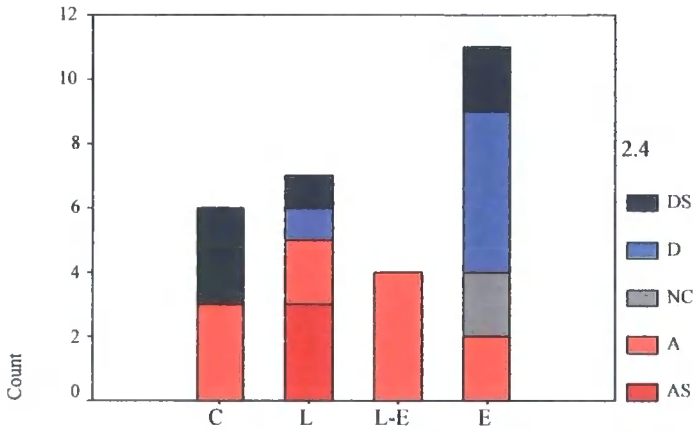
2.4 When faced with a couple currently cohabiting but seeking church marriage, the church should turn a 'blind eye' to their current situation.



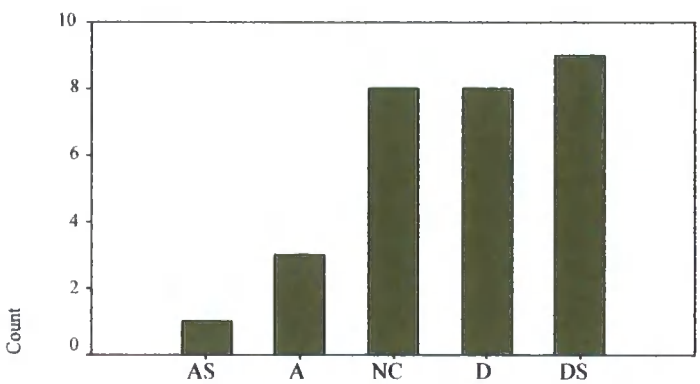
2.4 Total Response.

Sample size: 28.



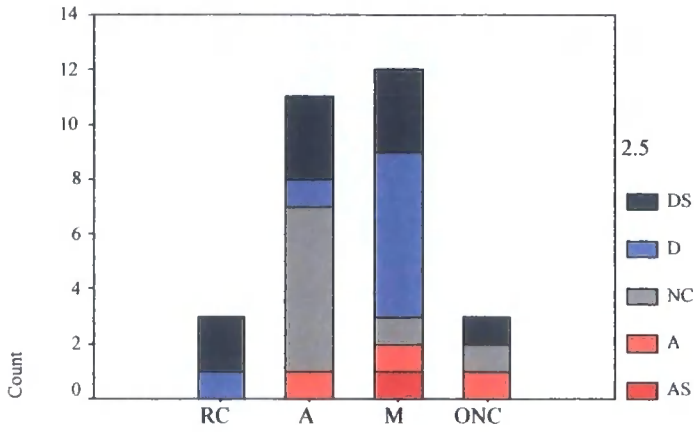


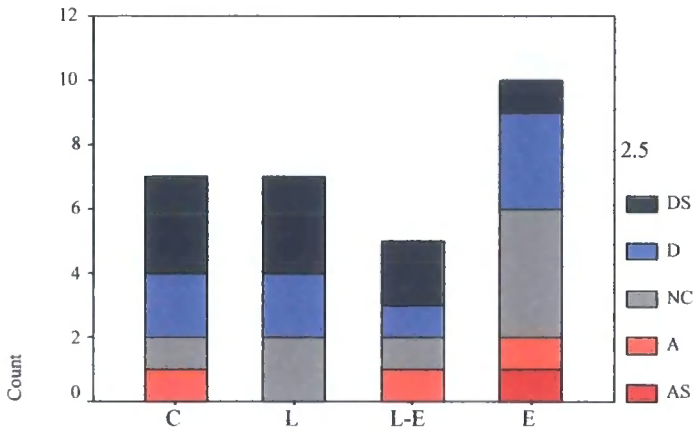
2.5 Most church marriages should be replaced by civil marriage plus a church blessing.



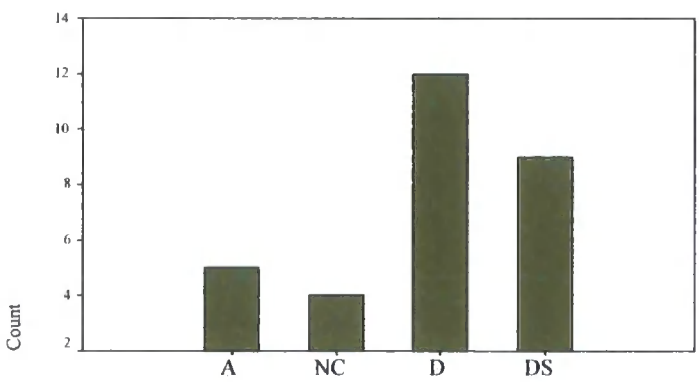
2.5 Total Response.

Sample size: 29.



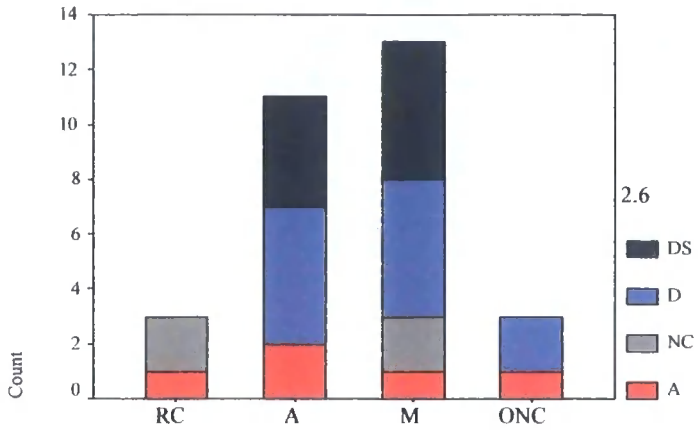


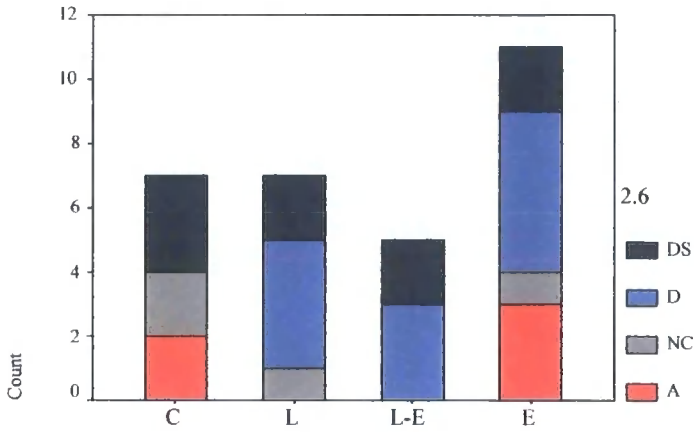
2.6 The church should encourage cohabitees to live apart for a period prior to the wedding.



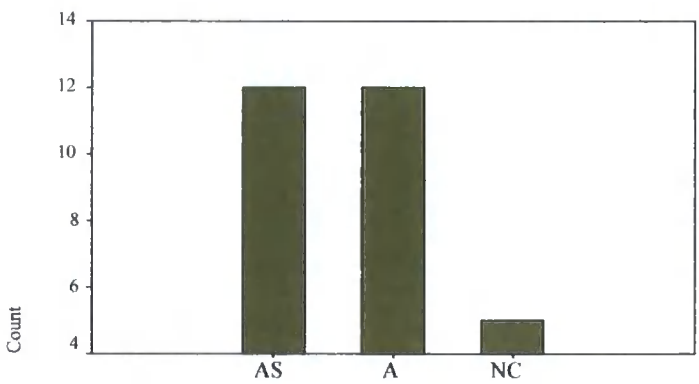
2.6 Total Response.

Sample size: 30.



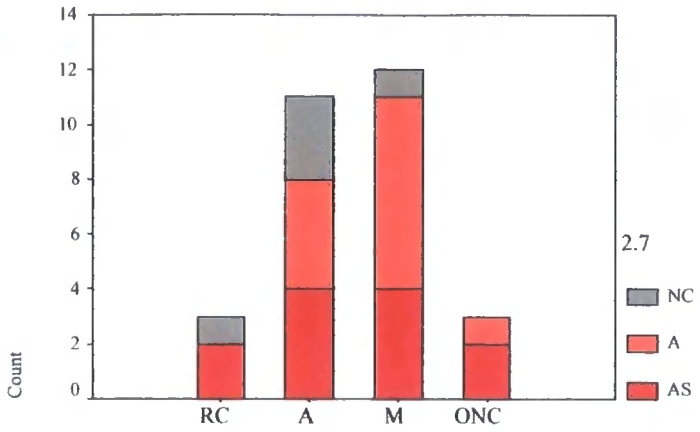


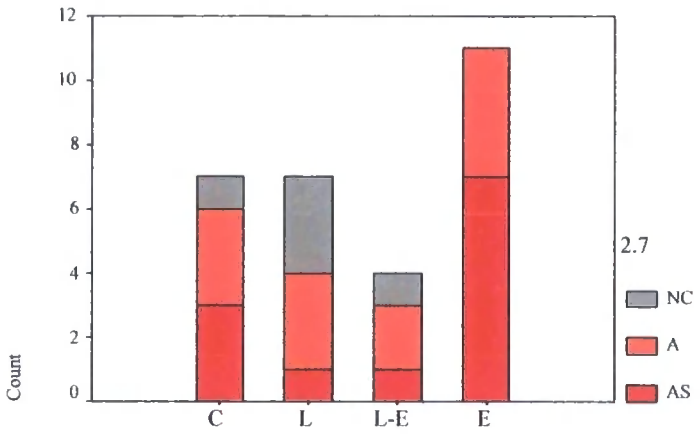
2.7 The church should strengthen Christian marriage preparation .



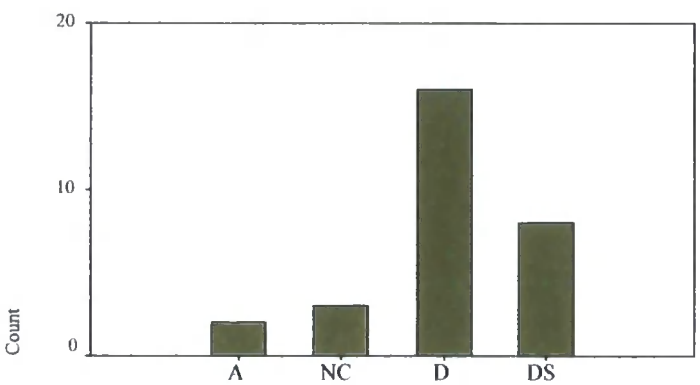
2.7 Total Response.

Sample size: 29.



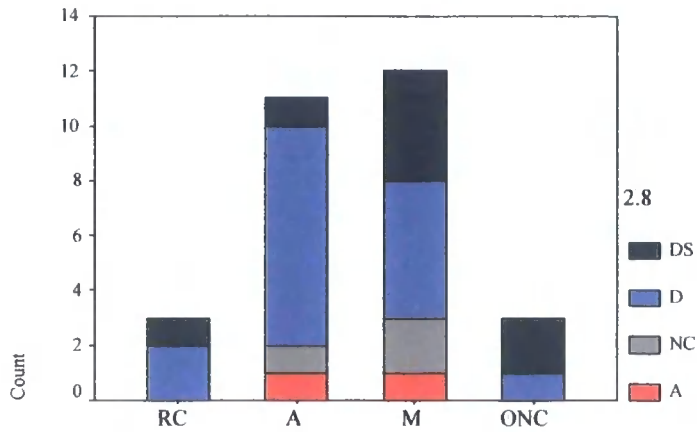


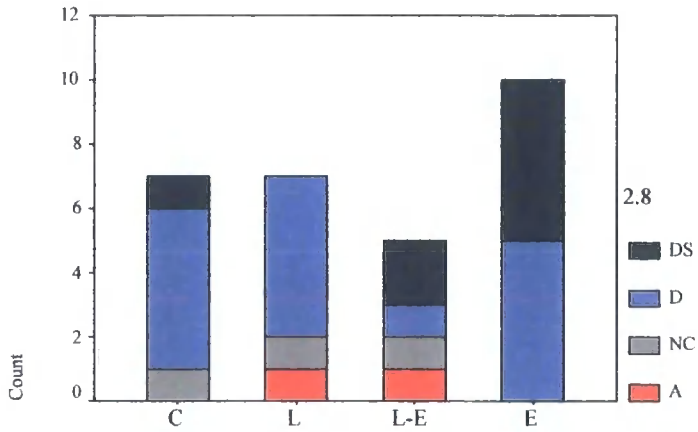
2.8 The church should accept 'trial marriage' as part of marriage preparation.



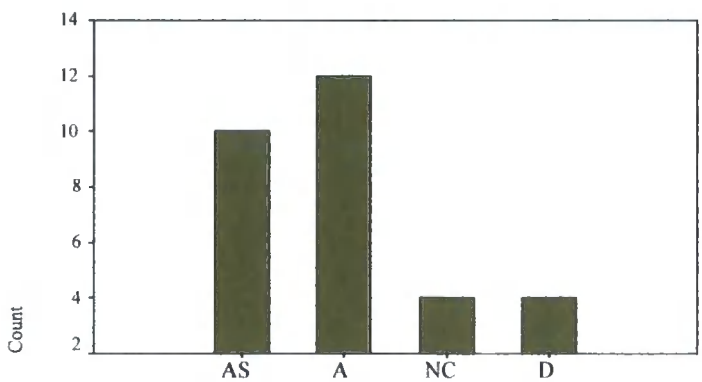
2.8 Total Response.

Sample size: 29.



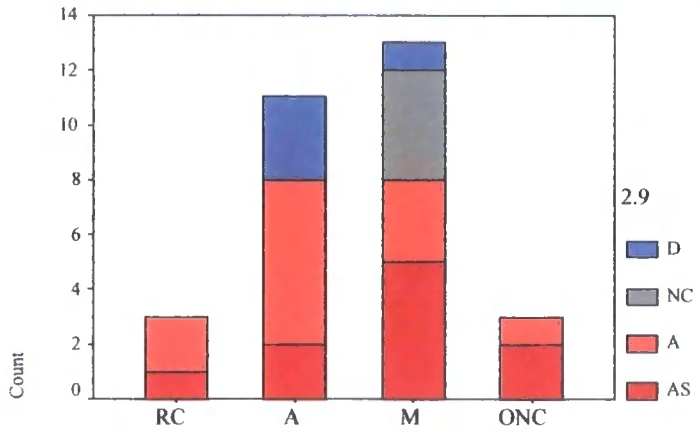


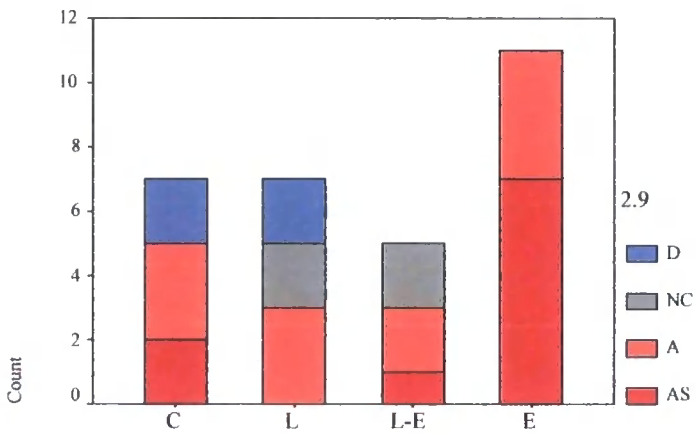
2.9 The church should seek to strengthen marriage itself and discourage cohabitation.



2.9 Total Response.

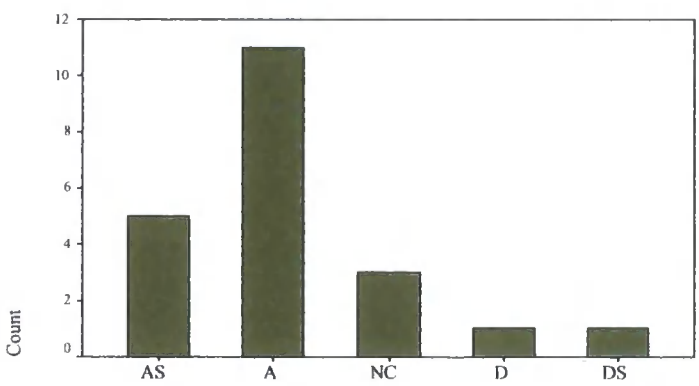
Sample size: 30.





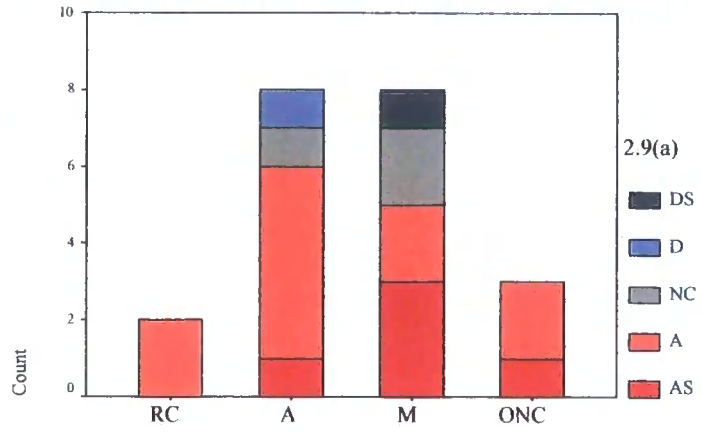
If you agree, which of the following factors would you consider important?

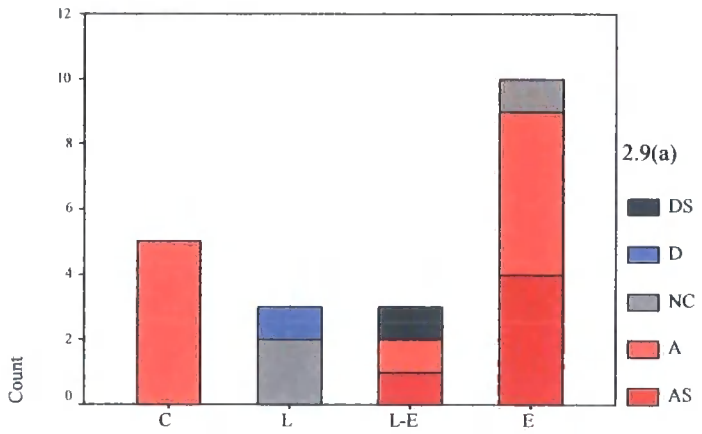
2.9(a) A programme of post-marriage pastoral care.



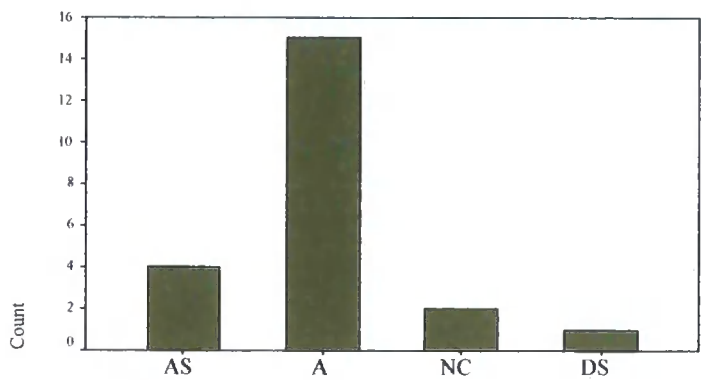
2.9(a) Total Response.

Sample size: 21.



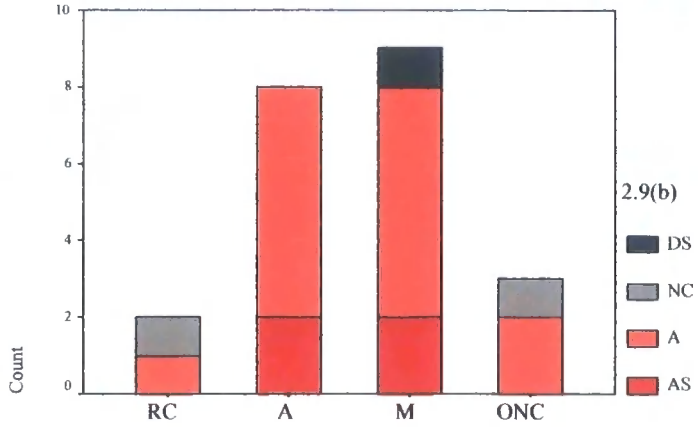


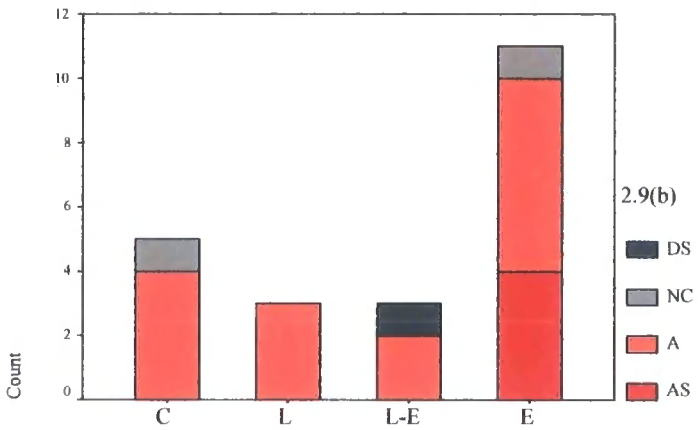
2.9(b) Services of rededication of marriage vows.



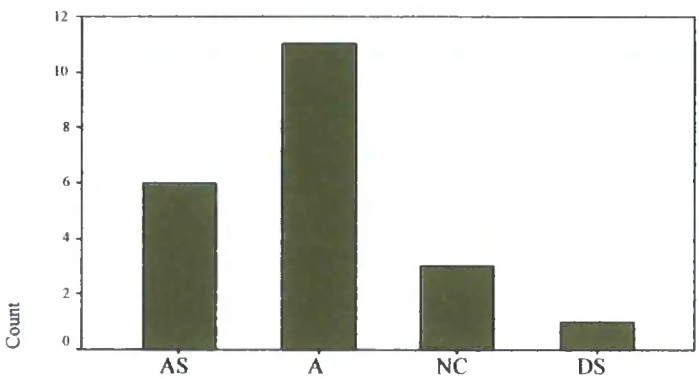
2.9(b) Total Response

Sample size: 22.



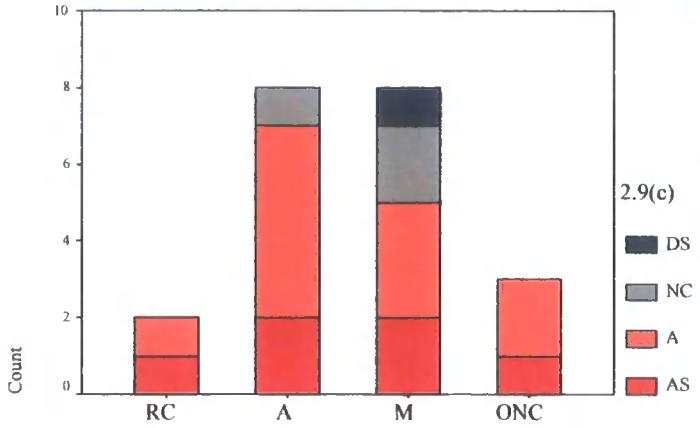


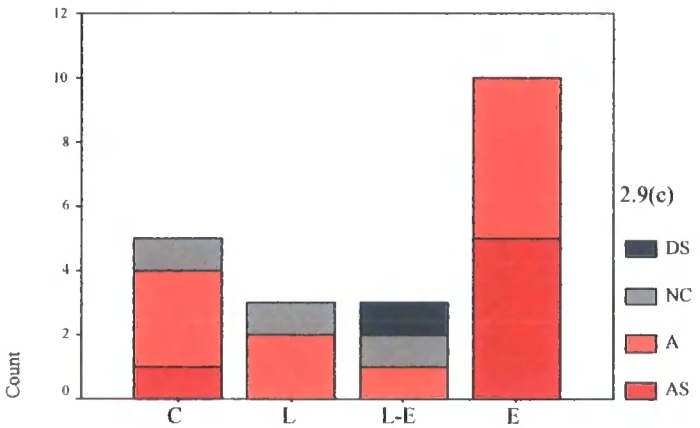
2.9(c) Involvement of already married couples in marriage preparation.



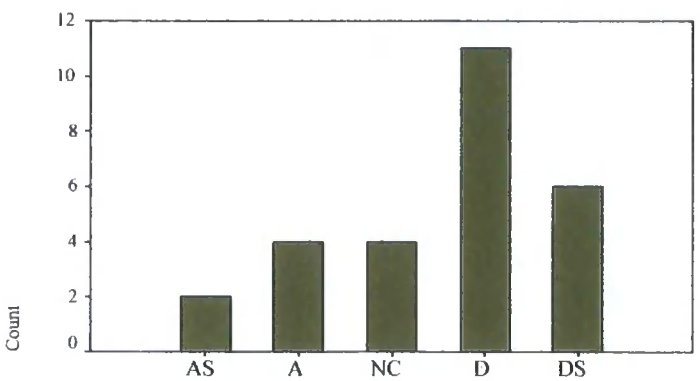
2.9(c) Total Response.

Sample size: 21.



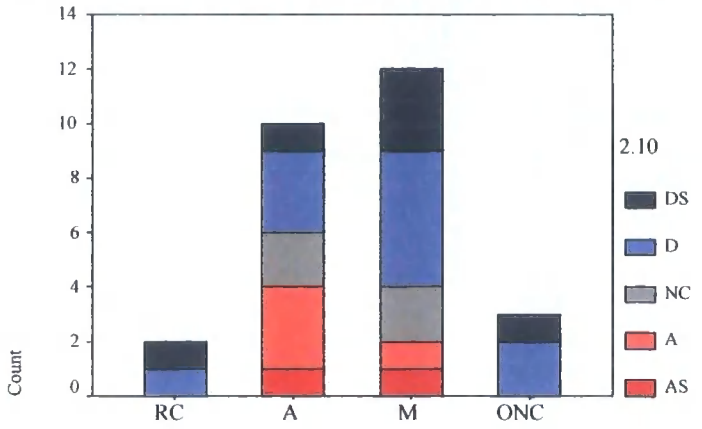


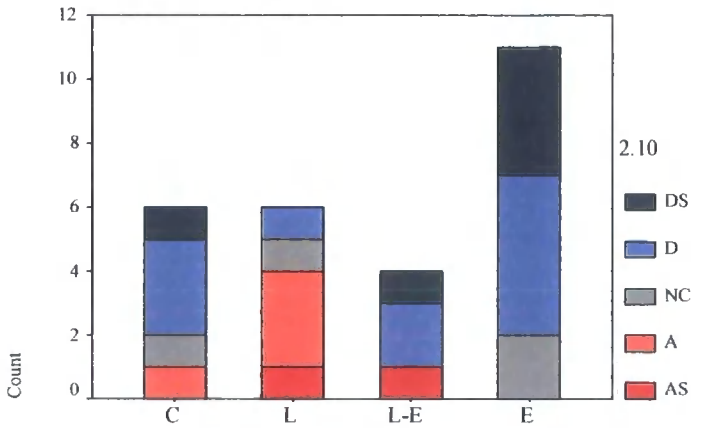
2.10 The marriage liturgy should be expanded to accommodate couples already cohabiting.



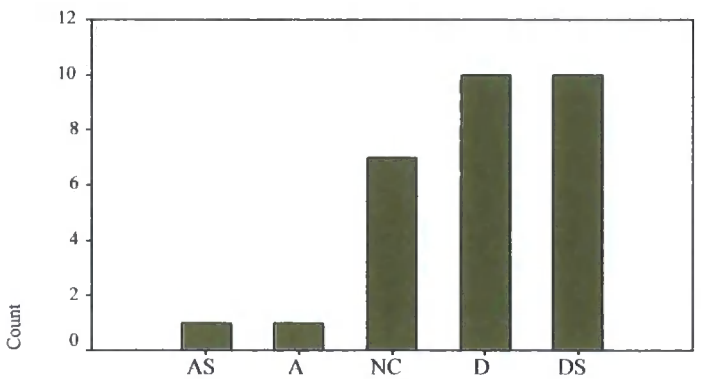
2.10 Total Response.

Sample size: 27.



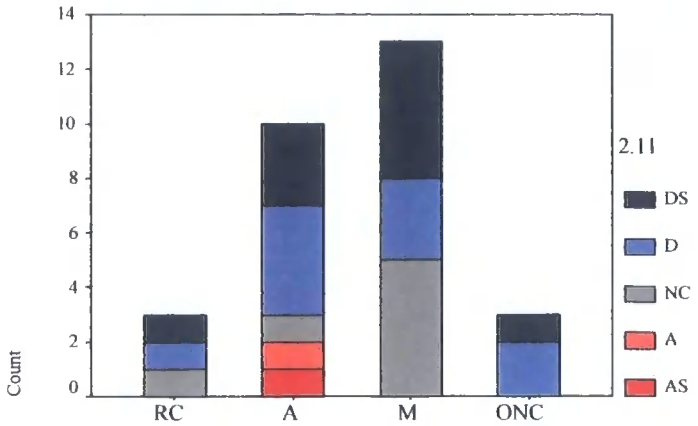


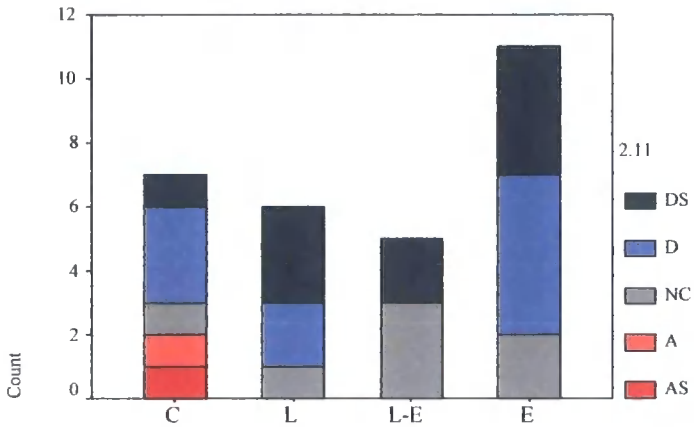
2.11 A Betrothal liturgy should be introduced for couples who wish to 'marry' before making a final commitment.



2.11 Total Response.

Sample size: 29.

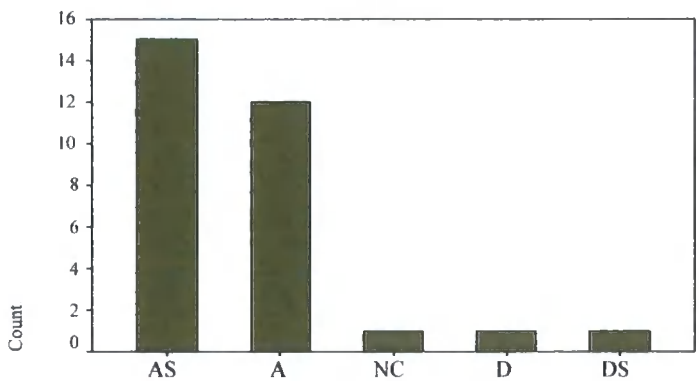




3. Cohabitation and Church Life

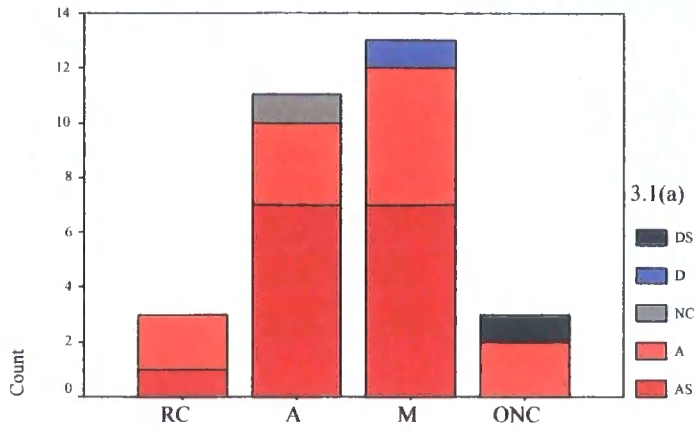
3.1 A couple, part of the worshipping community, are known to be cohabiting. They are happy with the arrangement and have no intention to marry. The church should

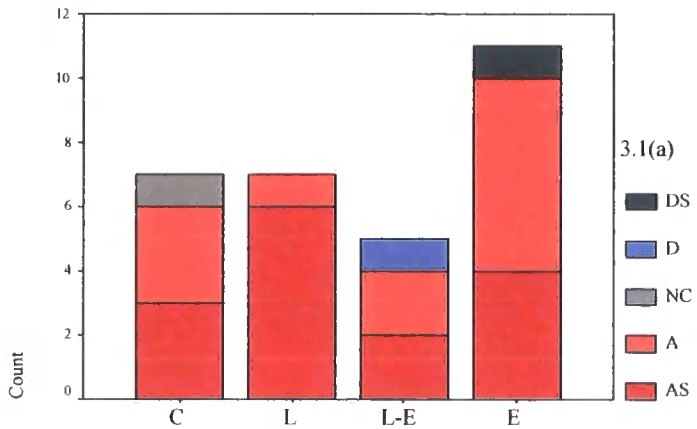
3.1(a) acept them as they are?



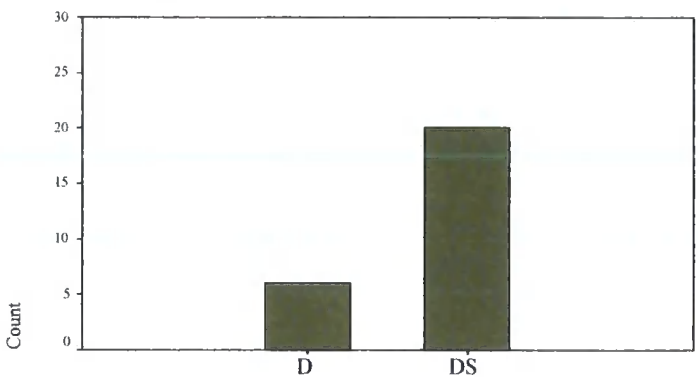
3.1(a) Total Response.

Sample size: 30.





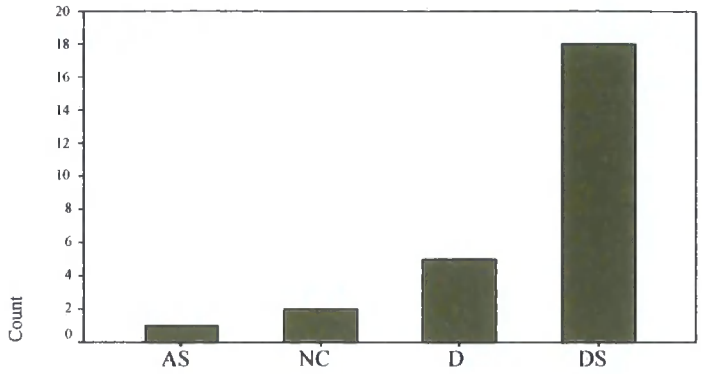
3.1(b) Bar them from worship?



3.1(b) Total Response.

Sample size: 26.

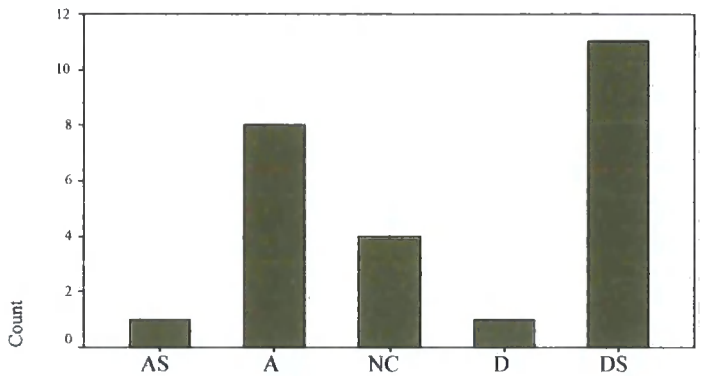
3.1(c) Bar them from communion?



3.1(c) Total Response.

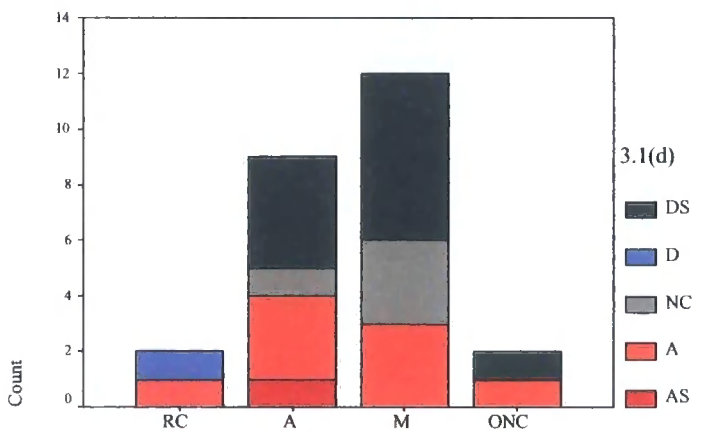
Sample size: 26.

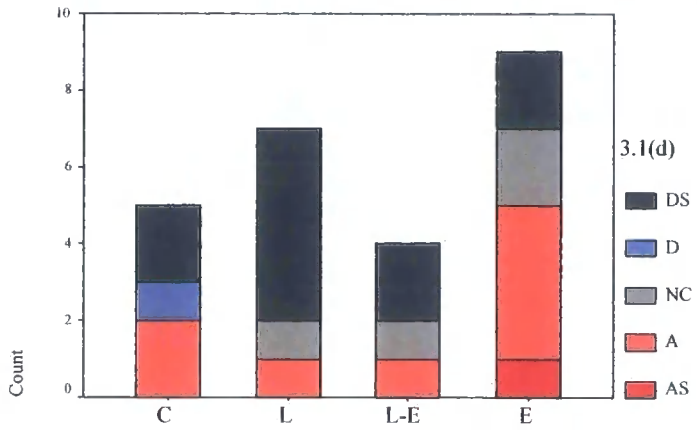
3.1(d) Bar them from holding office?



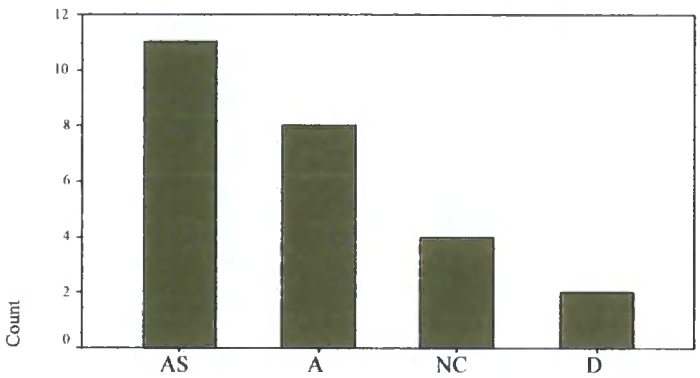
3.1(d) Total Response.

Sample size: 25.



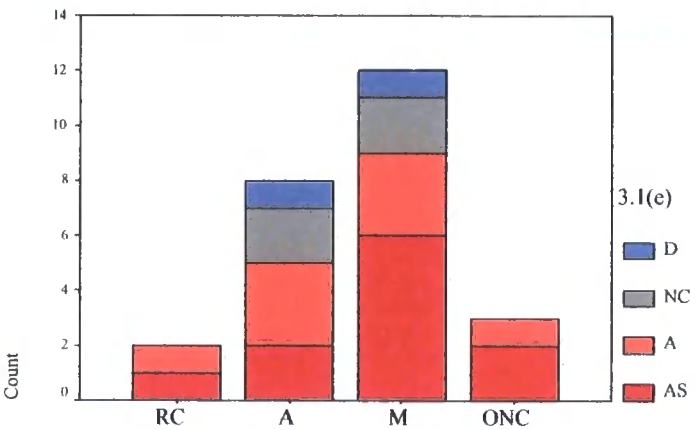


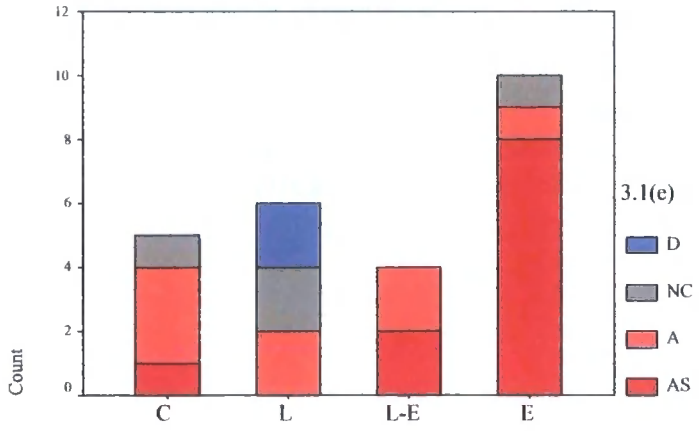
3.1(e) encourage them to marry?



3.1(e) Total Response.

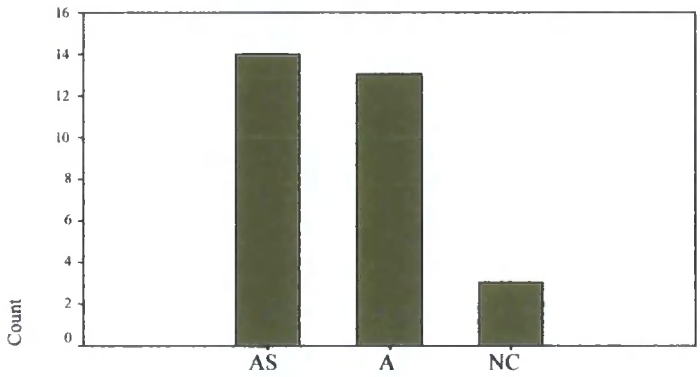
Sample size: 25.





3.2 A church going worshipper is cohabiting with a non-church going partner. The church should

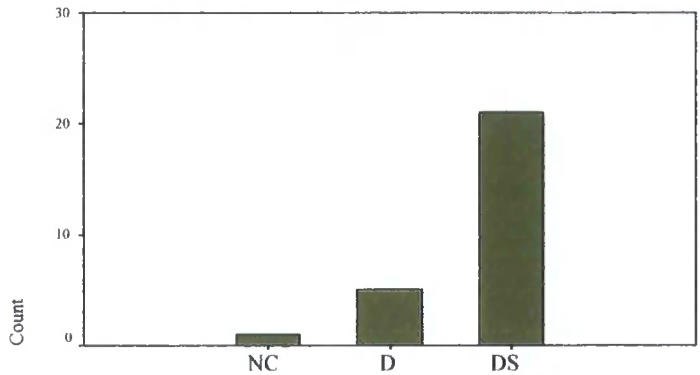
3.2(a) Accept the person as he/she is?



3.2(a) Total Response.

Sample size: 30.

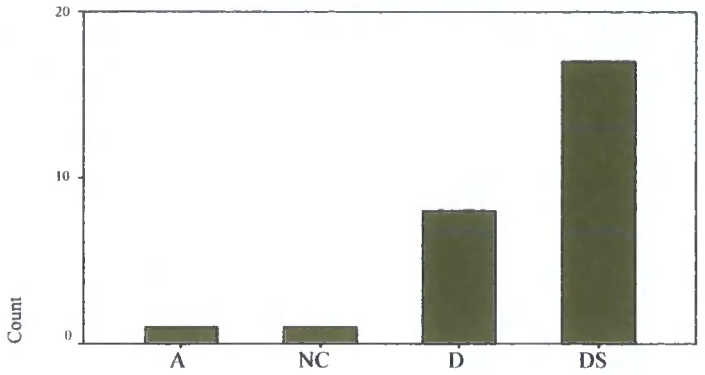
3.2(b) Bar the person from worship?



3.2(b) Total Response.

Sample size: 27.

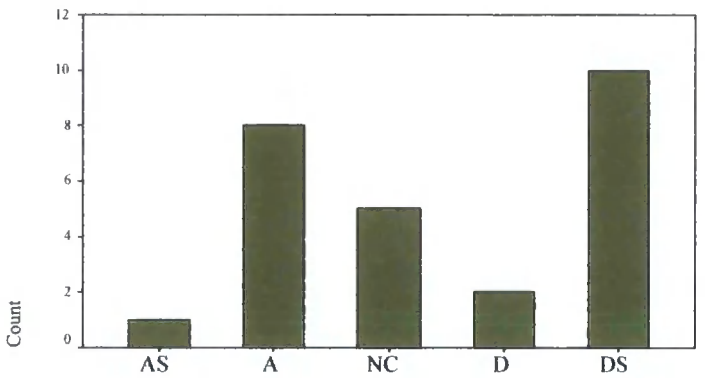
3.2(c) bar the person from communion?



3.2(c) Total Response.

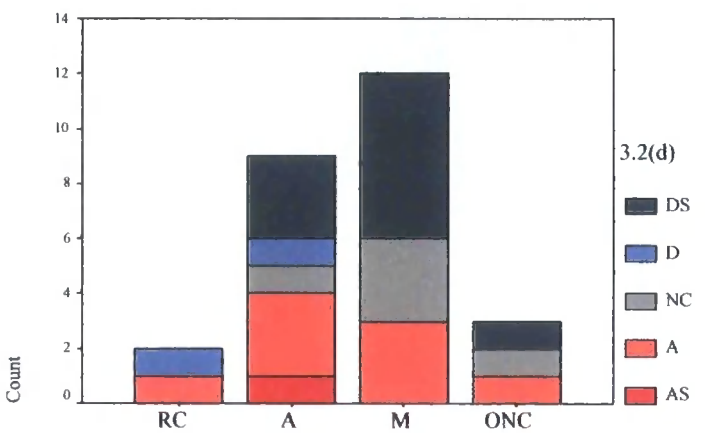
Sample size: 27.

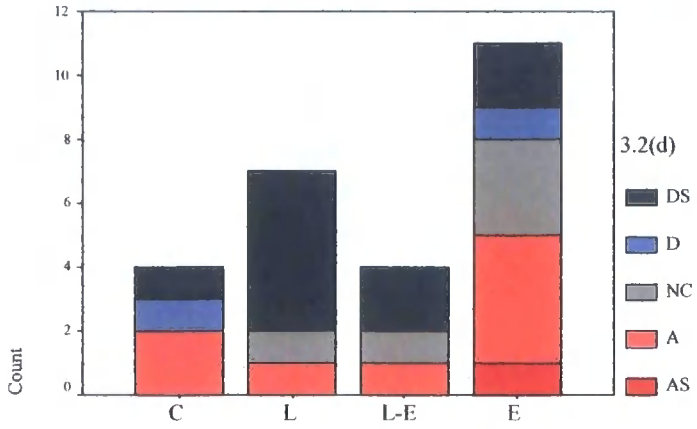
3.2(d) bar the person from holding office?



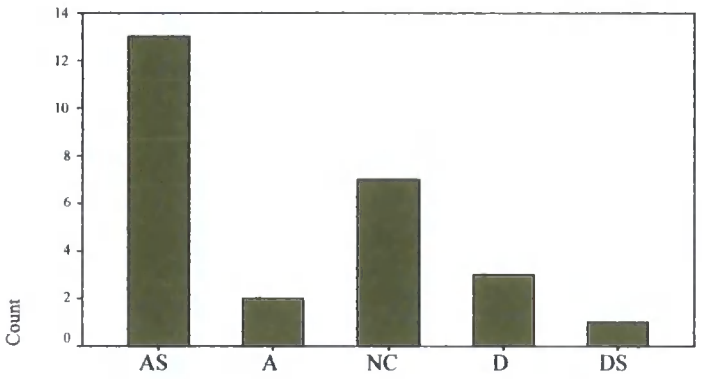
3.2(d) Total Response.

Sample size: 26.



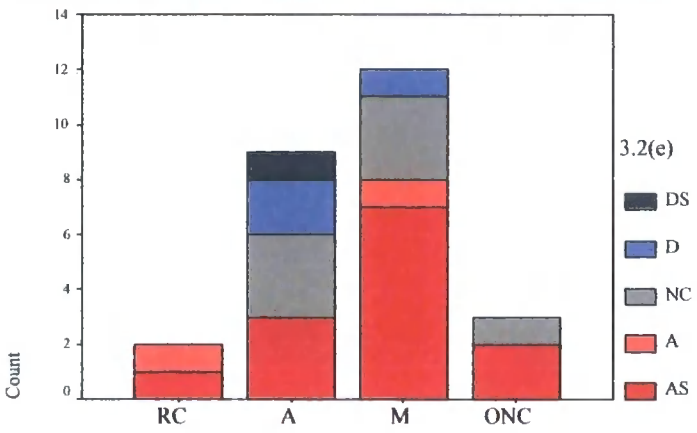


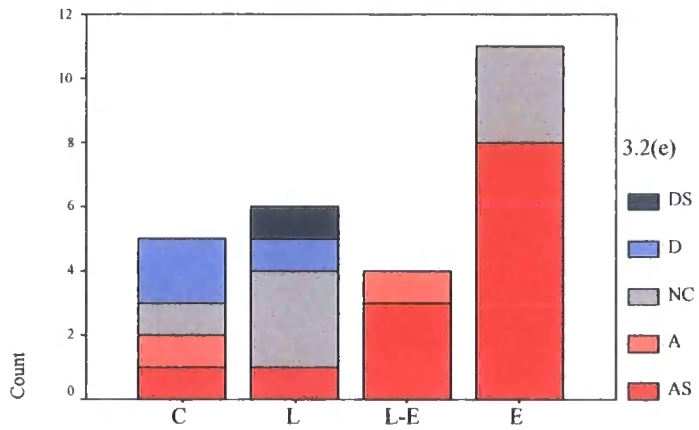
3.2(e) encourage them to marry?



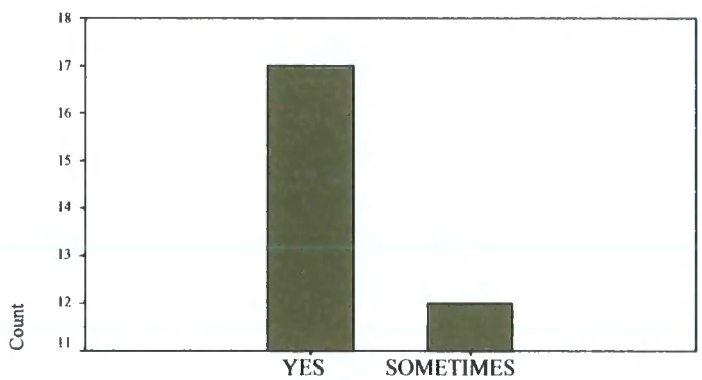
3.2(e) Total Response.

Sample size: 26.





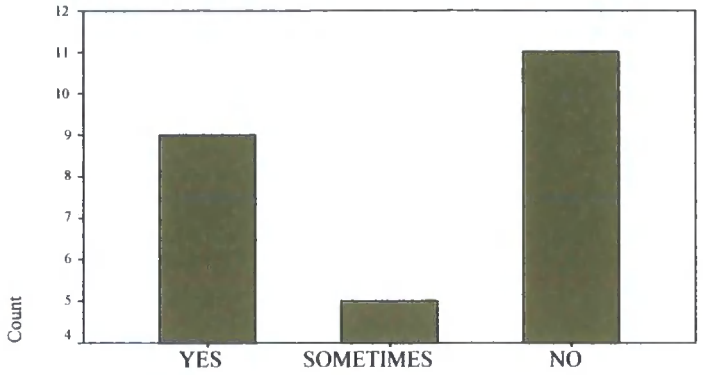
3.3 A couple within the church family known to be cohabiting should be encouraged to marry.



3.3 Total Response.

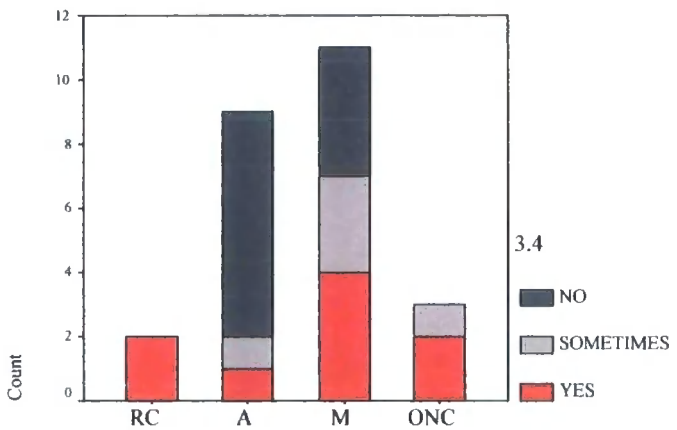
Sample size: 29.

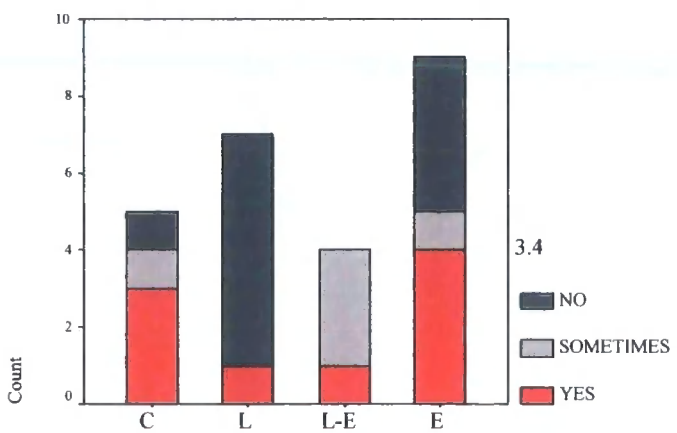
3.4 If the couple refuses to marry, the church should not insist.



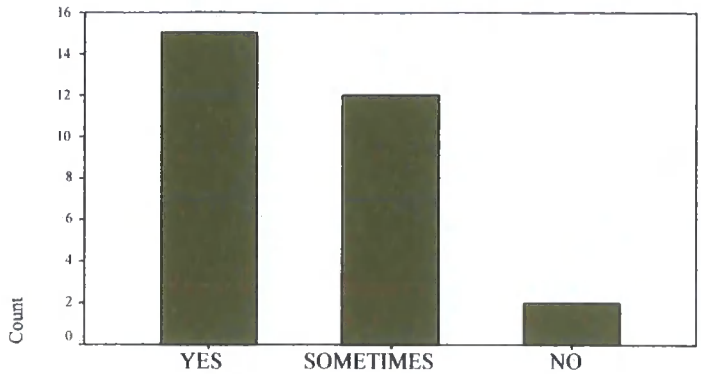
3.4 Total Response.

Sample size: 25.



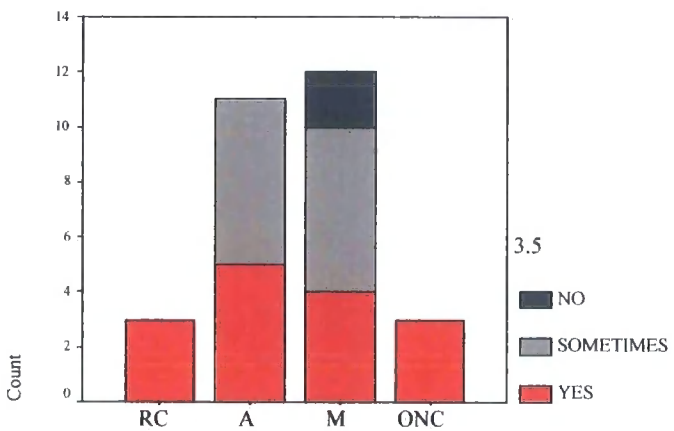


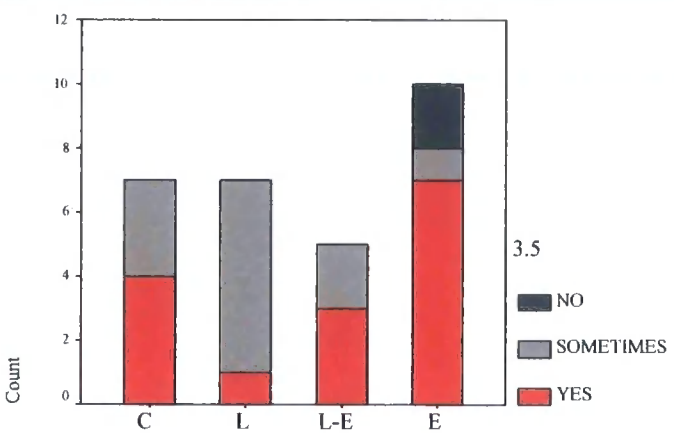
3.5 Any couple known to be cohabiting should be encouraged to marry.



3.5 Total Response.

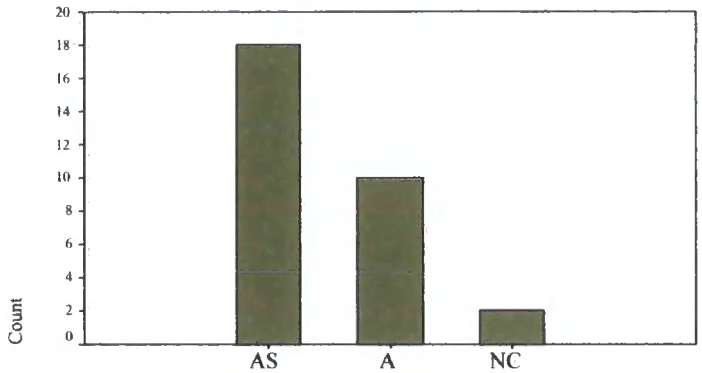
Sample size: 29.





3.6 The church should give pastoral care to any cohabiting couple

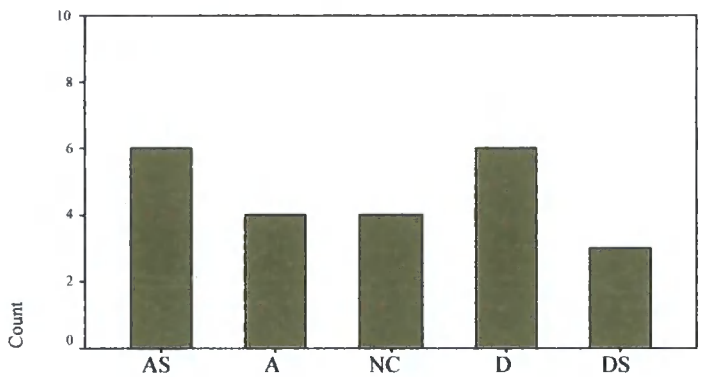
3.6(a) as a couple?



3.6(a) Total Response.

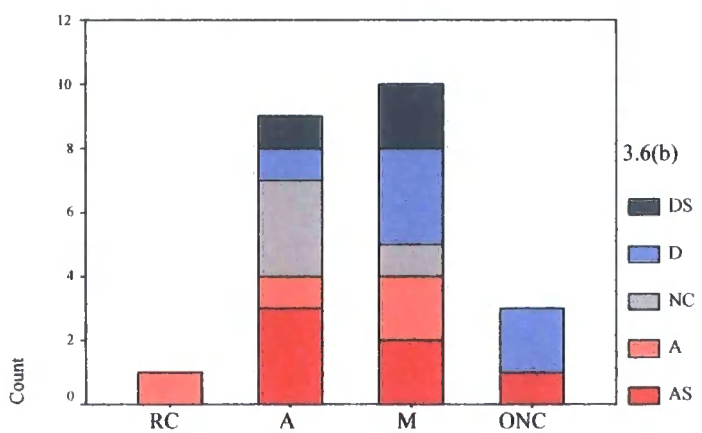
Sample size: 30.

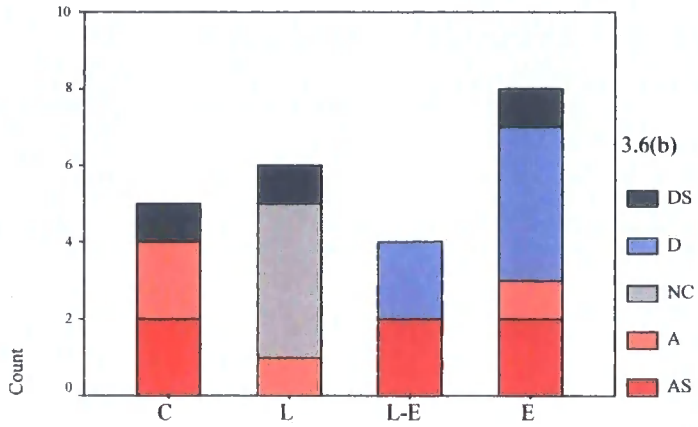
3.6(b) to both, but on an individual basis?



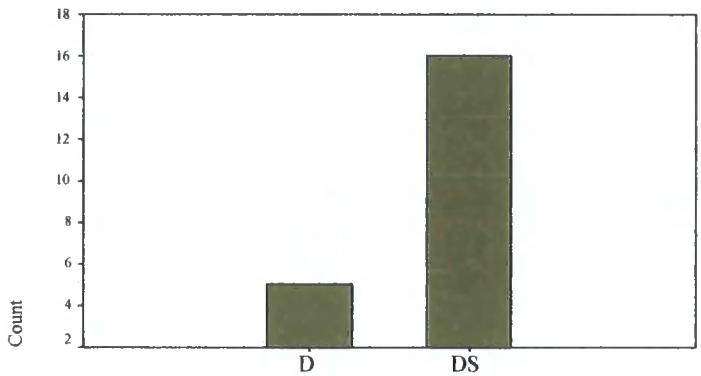
3.6(b) Total Response.

Sample size: 23.





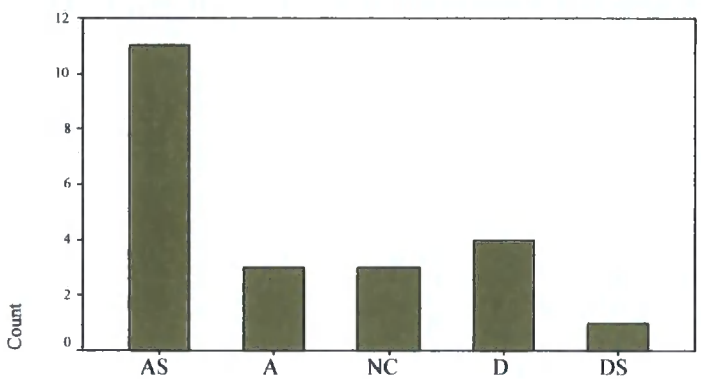
3.6(c) to neither partner?



3.6(c) Total Response.

Sample size: 21.

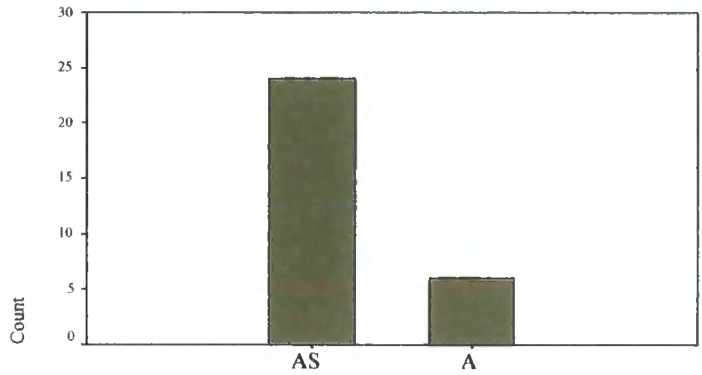
3.6(d) according to circumstances?



3.6(d) Total Response.

Sample size: 22.

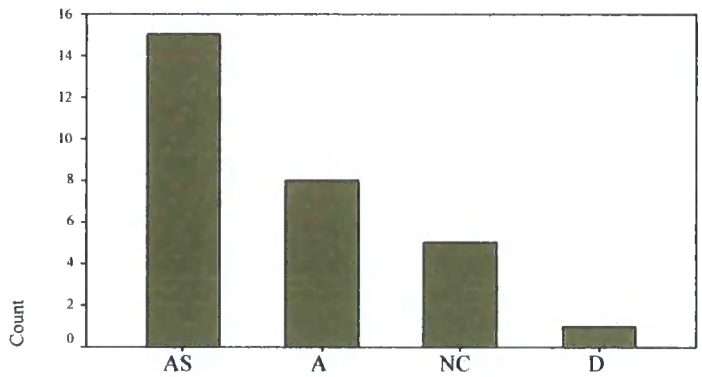
3.7 The church should accept children of a cohabiting couple into the congregation.



3.7 Total Response.

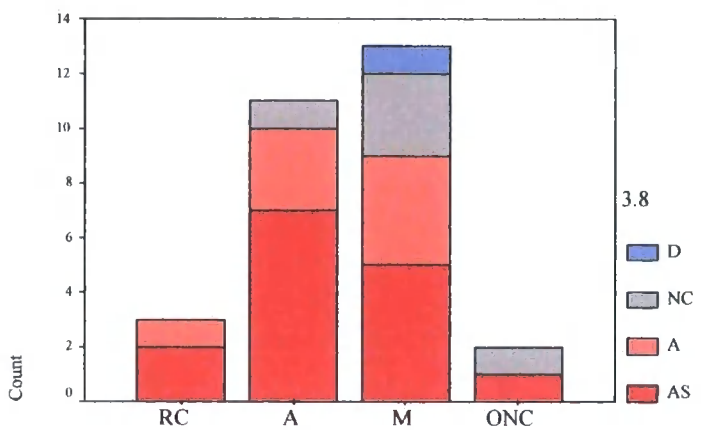
Sample size: 30.

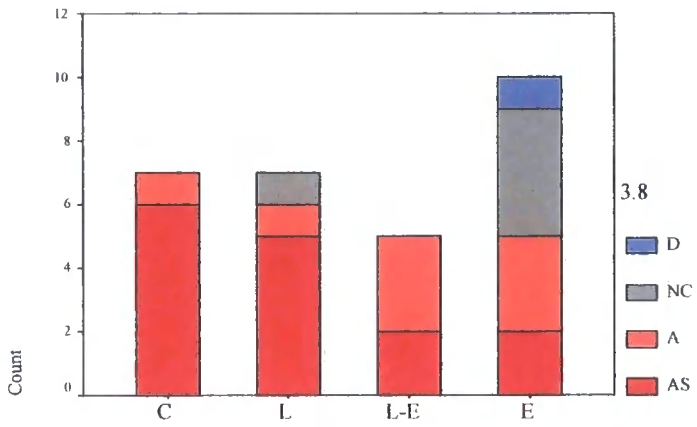
3.8 The church should baptise children of a couple known to be cohabiting.



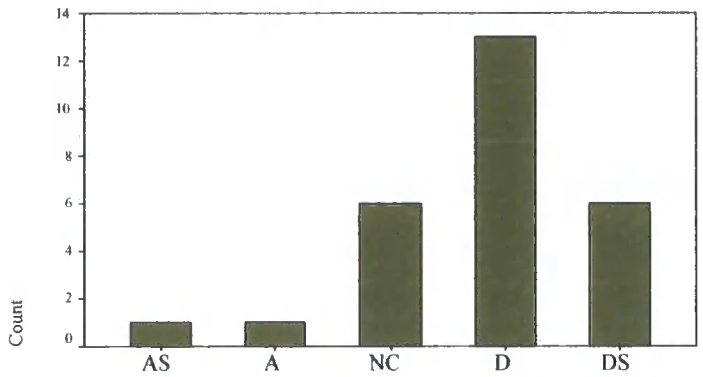
3.8 Total Response.

Sample size: 30.



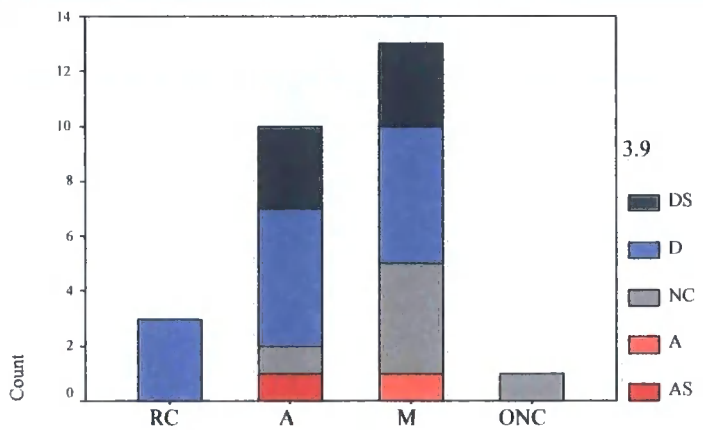


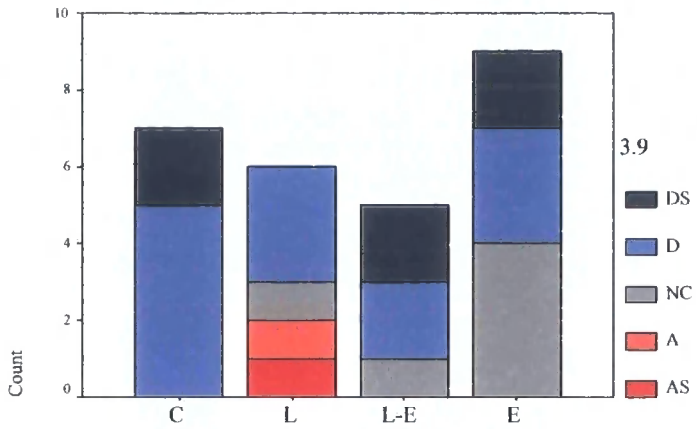
3.9 The liturgy for Baptism should be expanded to accommodate cohabitation.



3.9 Total Response.

Sample size: 27.





4. General Comments.

Comments received via the questionnaire and through the interviews together with the numerical results of this survey are discussed in Chapter 4.

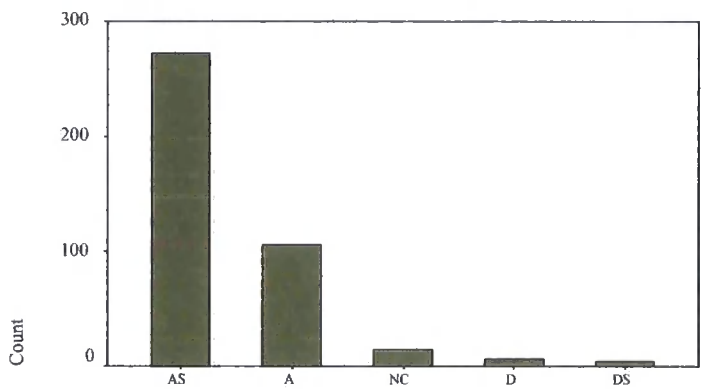
Appendix V

Congregations' Attitudes to Cohabitation

This appendix presents, without comment, the findings from the Congregation Survey Questionnaire. The analytical methods together with explanations of the annotations are explained in Appendix I. The headings shown in bold are copied from the questionnaire (see Appendix I(c)).

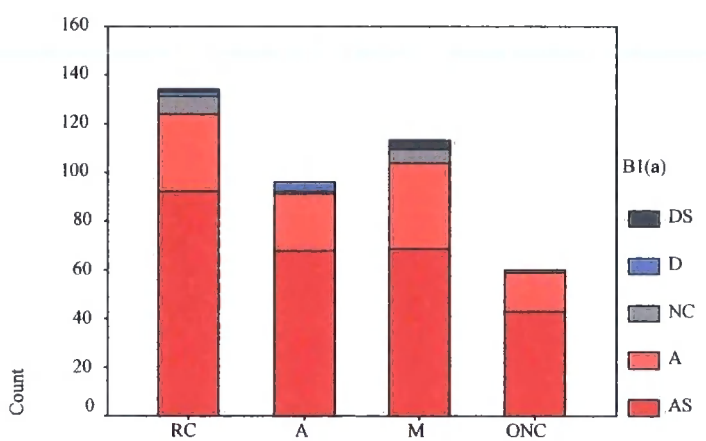
SECTION B – Views on Marriage.

B1 (a) Marriage is God's preferred way for couples to live.



B1(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 403.



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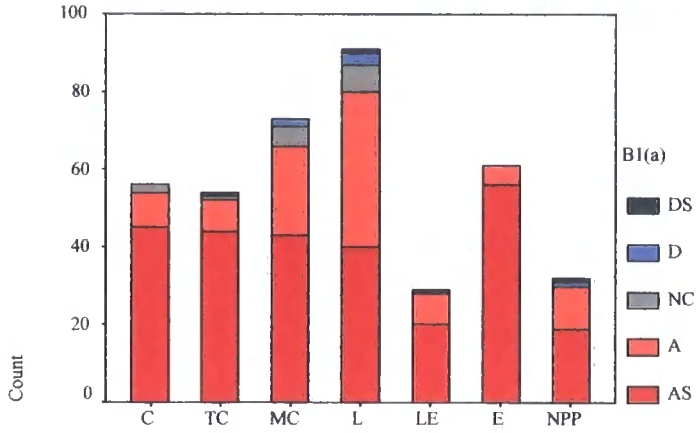
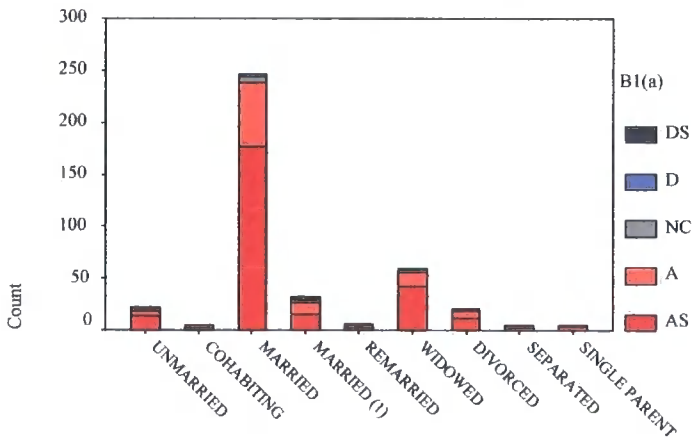


Sample Size: 396.



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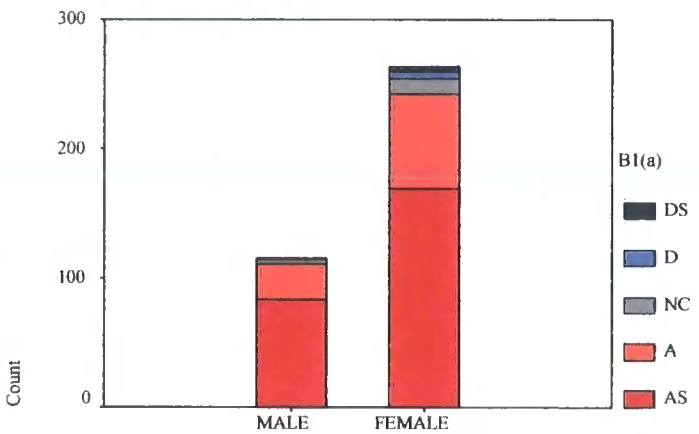
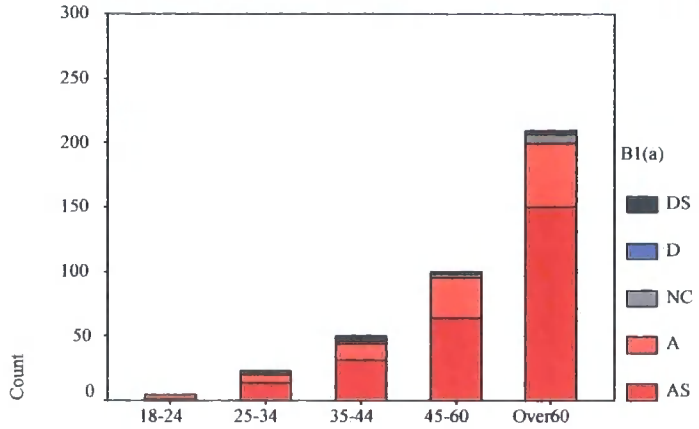
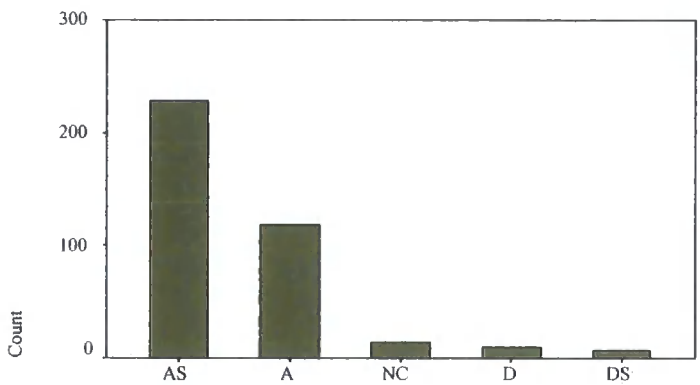


Sample Size: 378.



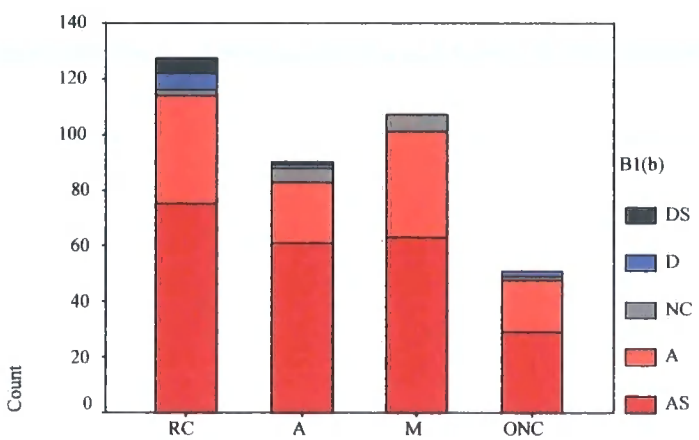
Sample Size: 387.

B1 (b) In the C21, it is still realistic to make a lifetime commitment to one's partner.

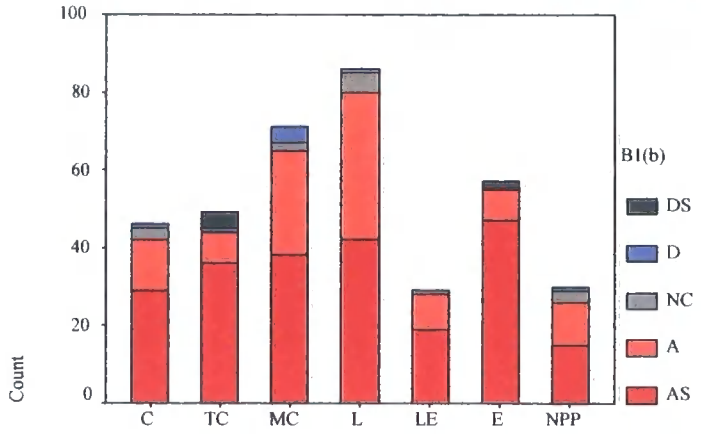


B1(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

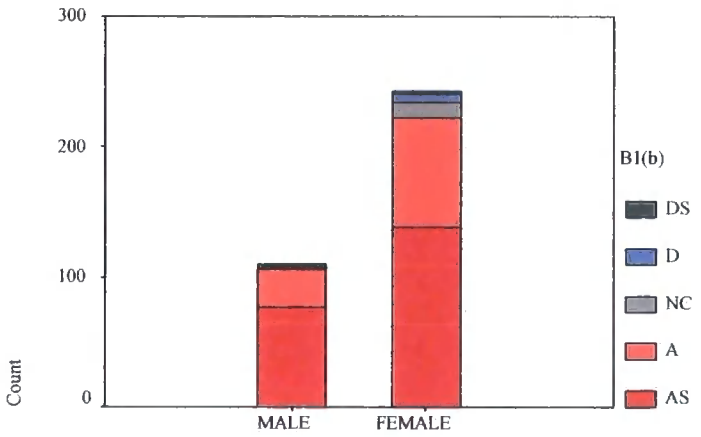
Sample Size: 375.



Sample Size: 375.

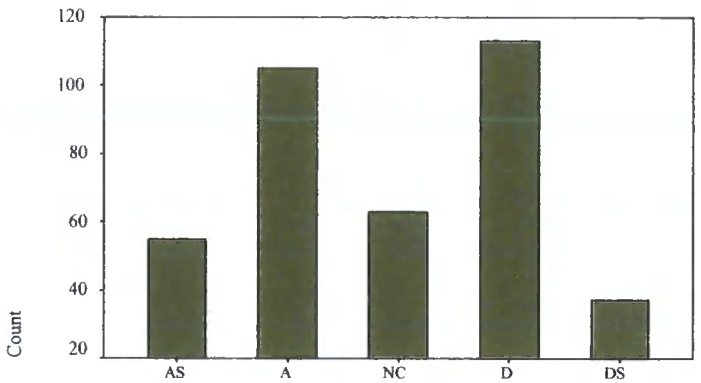


Sample Size: 368.



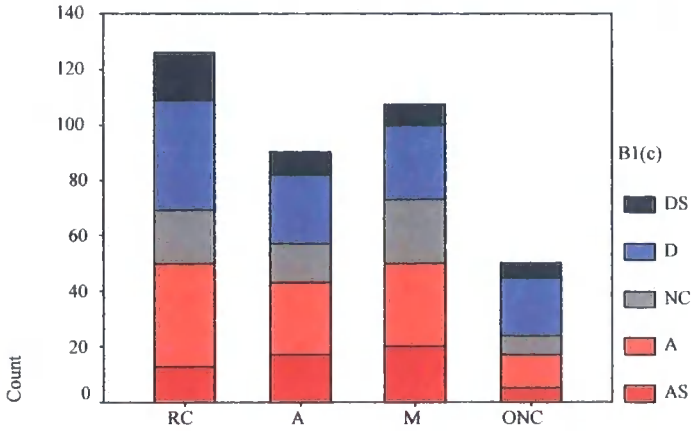
Sample Size: 352.

B1 (c) The quality of the relationship is more important than being married.



B1(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 373.



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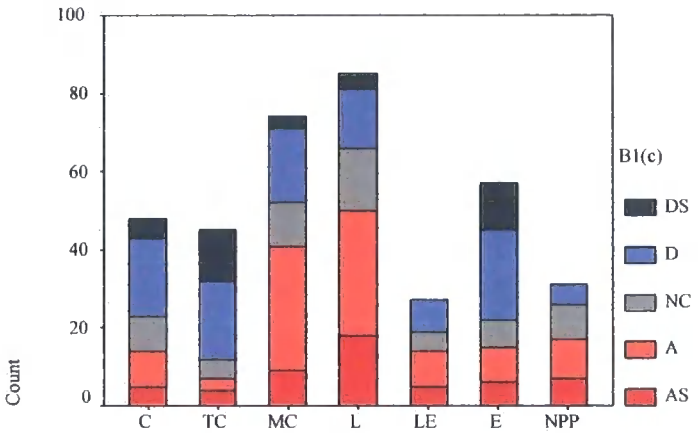

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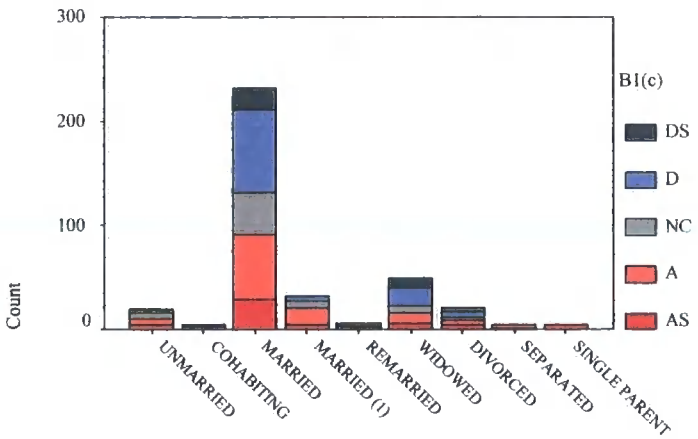
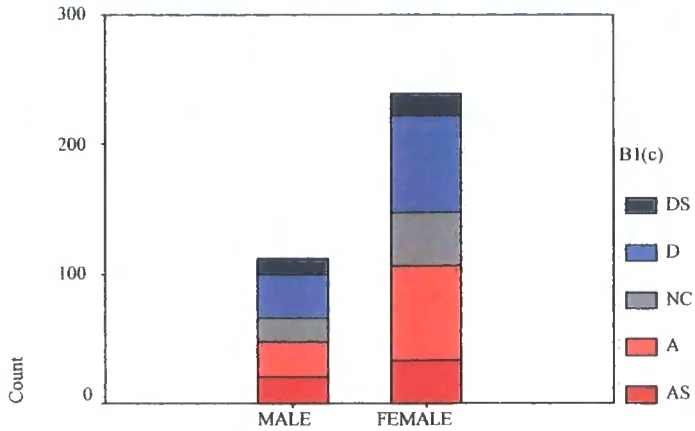
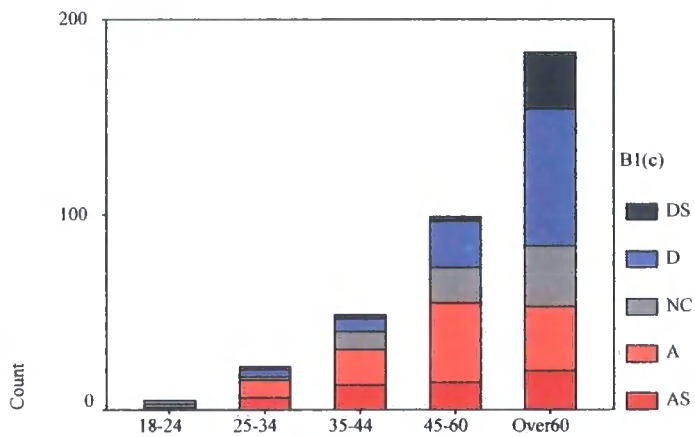


Sample Size: 371.

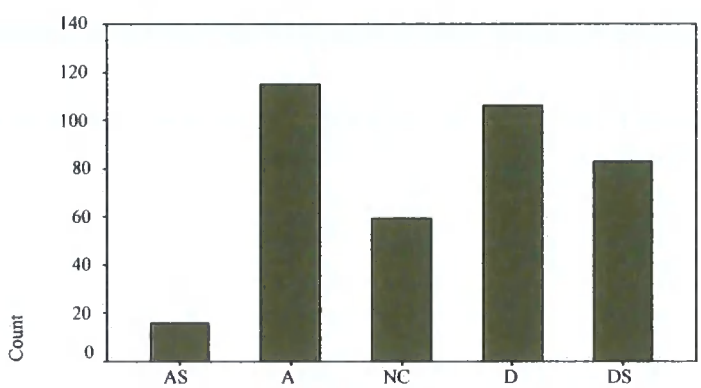


Sample Size: 351.



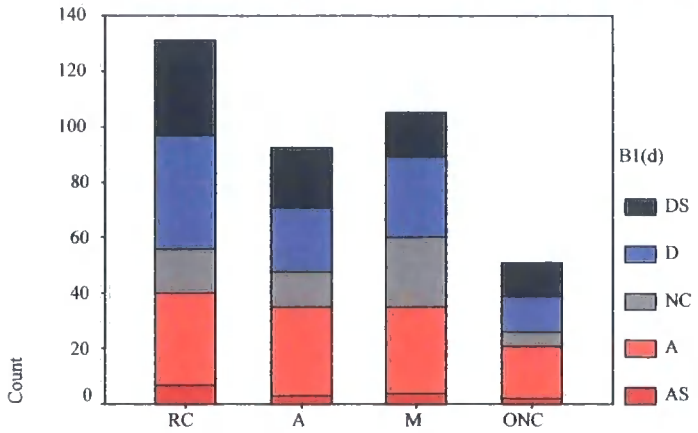
Sample Size: 358.

B1 (d) Cohabitation is now part of the process of getting to know each other.



B1(d) TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 379.



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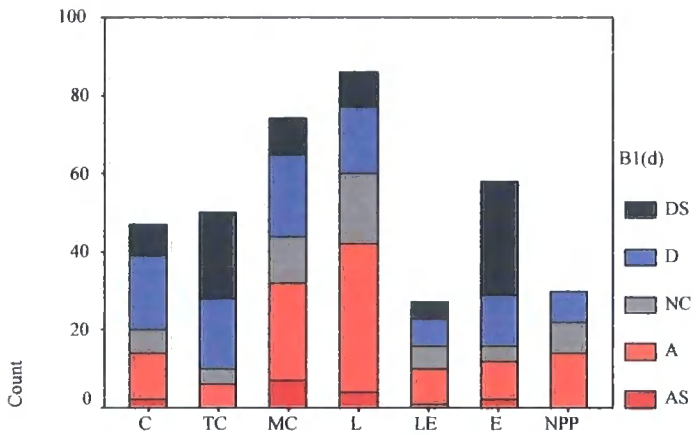

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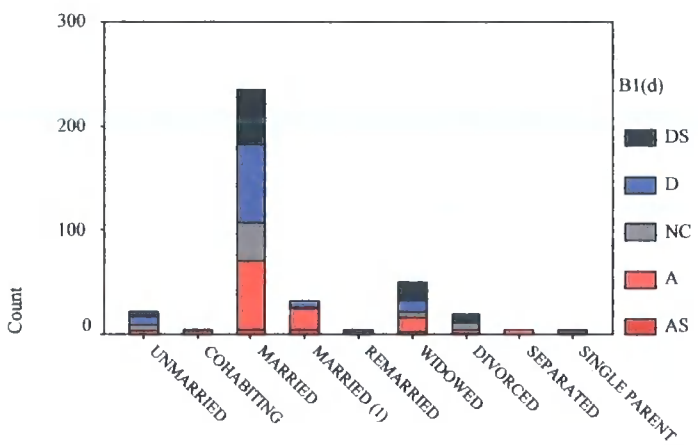
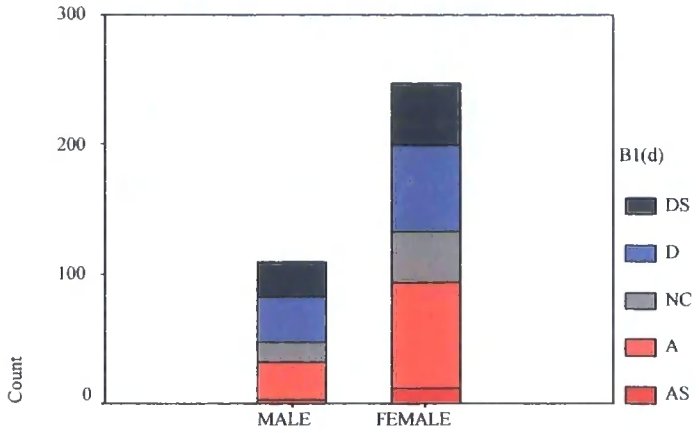


Sample Size: 377.



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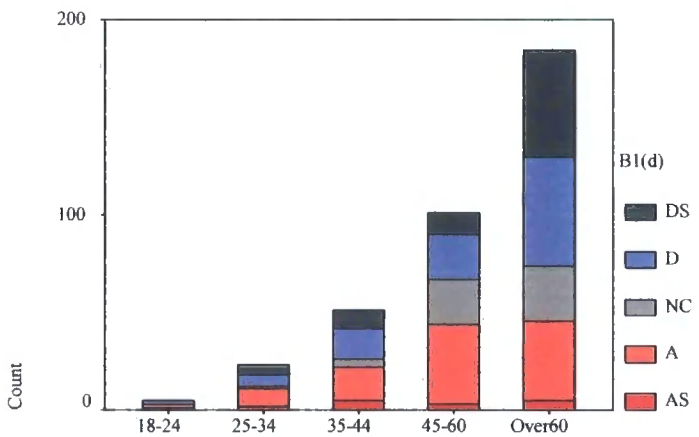
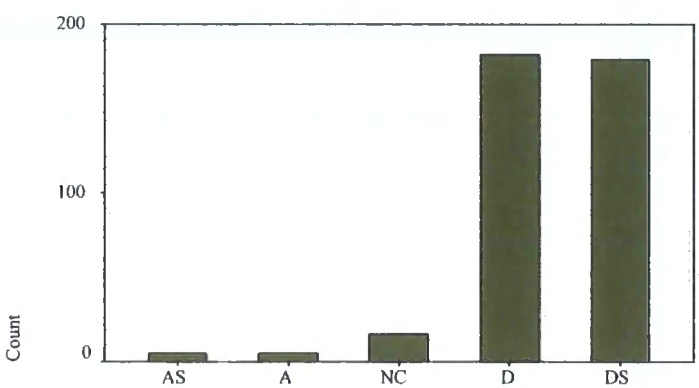


Sample Size: 364.

B1 (e) Marriage matters only if you have children.



B1(e) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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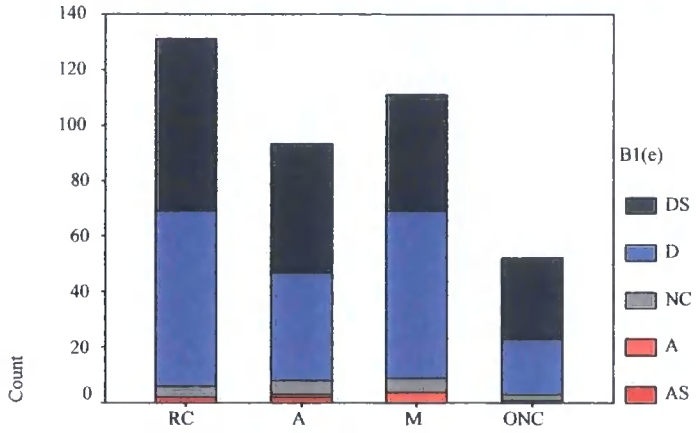
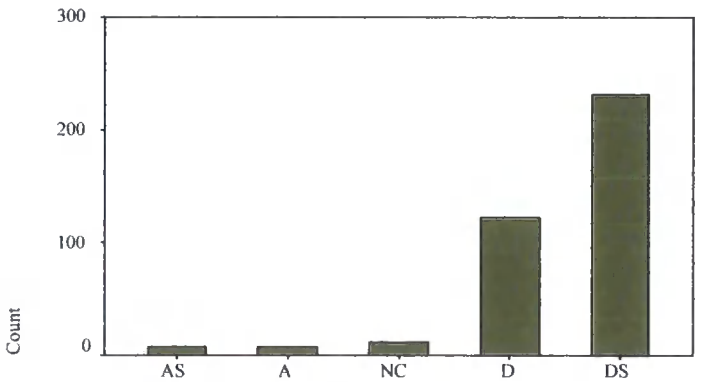


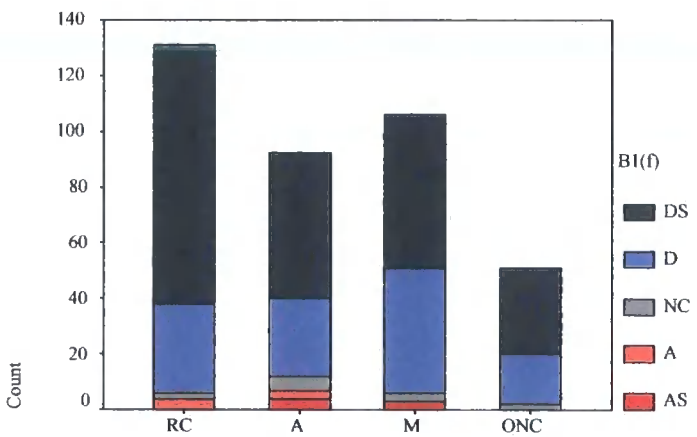
Sample Size: 387.

B1 (f) Marriage is unnecessary in present day society.



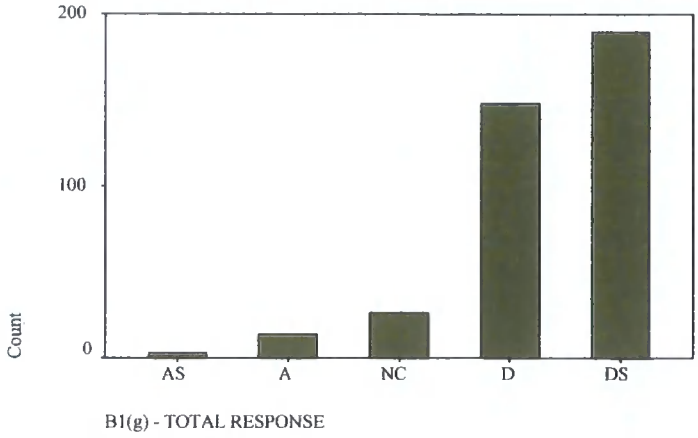
B1(f) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 380.



Sample Size: 380.

B1 (g) In society today, it is important to have a relationship that can be dismantled with minimum formality.



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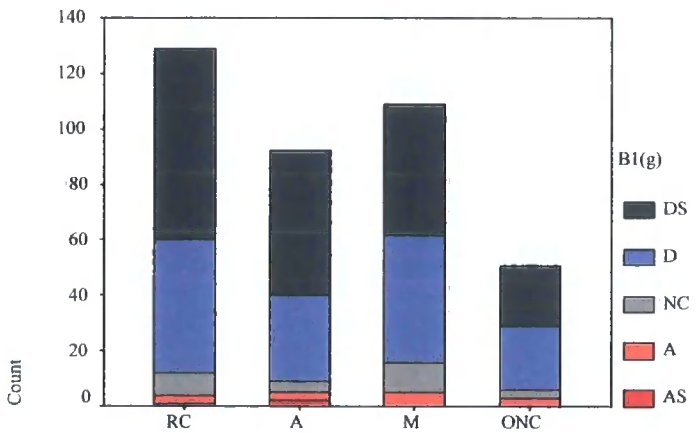
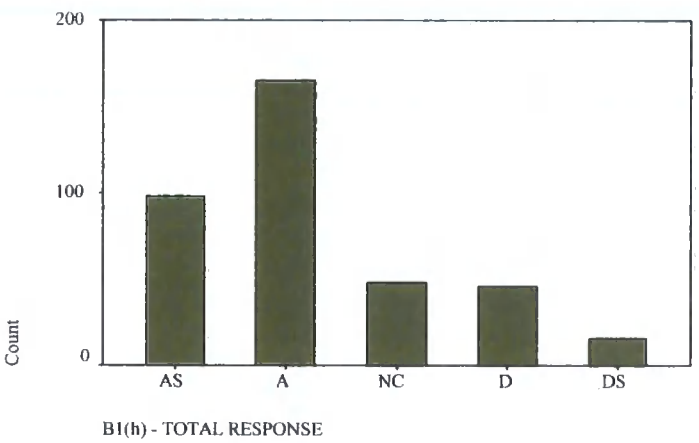


Sample Size: 381.

B1 (h) There is too much emphasis on individual fulfilment to the detriment of marriage.



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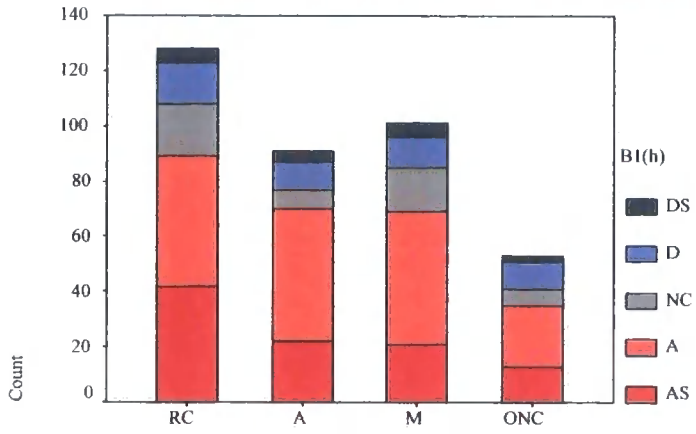

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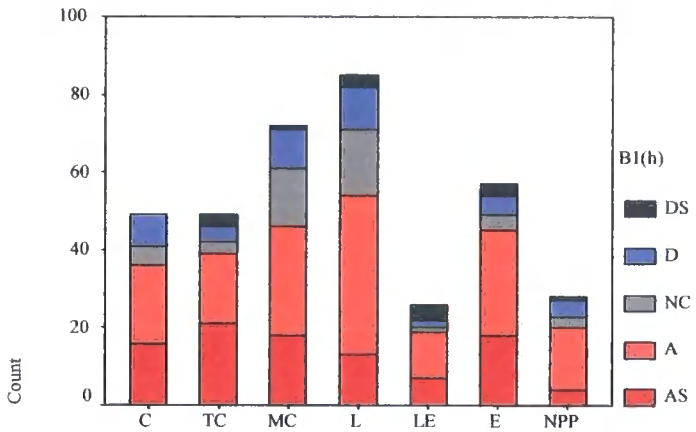

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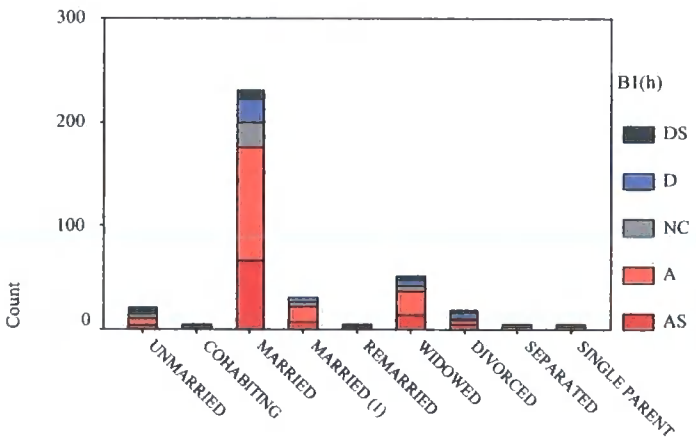

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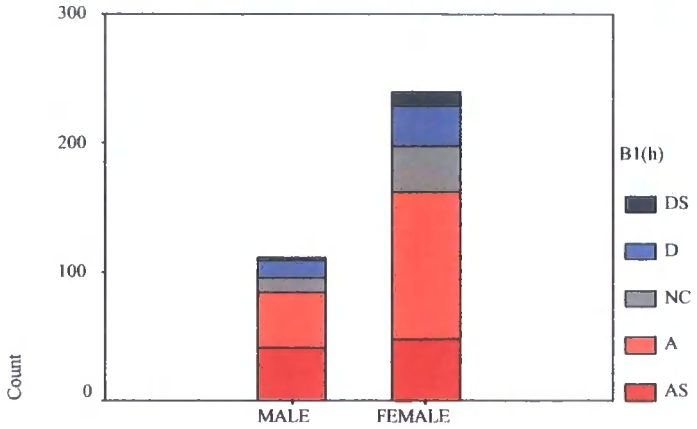

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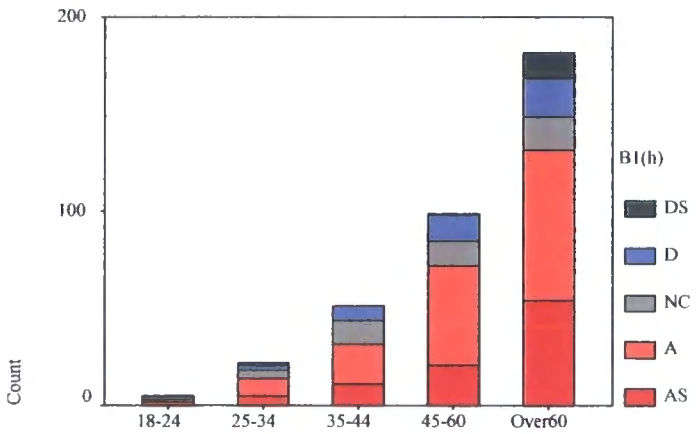
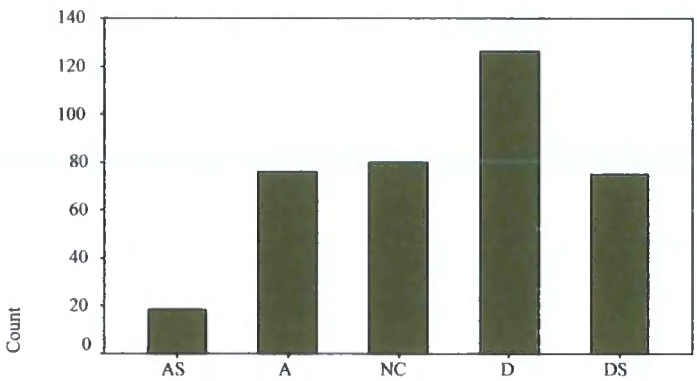


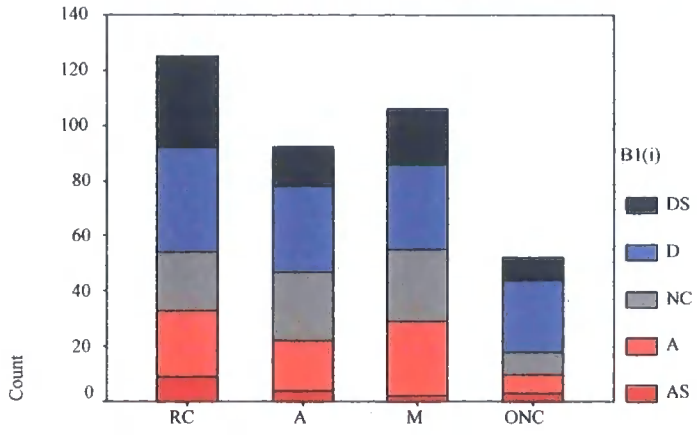
Sample Size: 359.

B1 (i) A partnership agreement should be introduced to give cohabiting couples more security.



B1(i) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 375.



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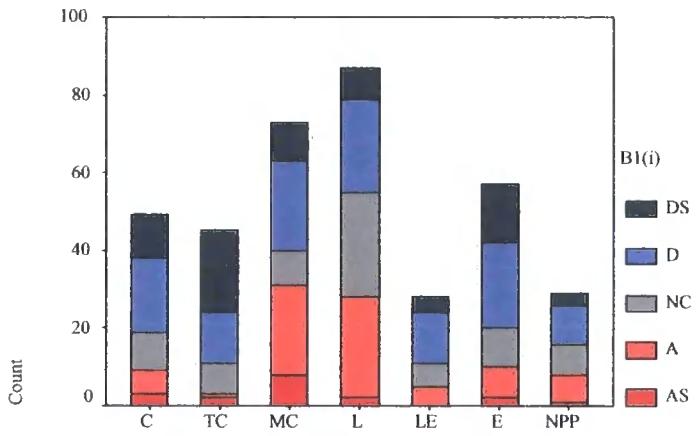

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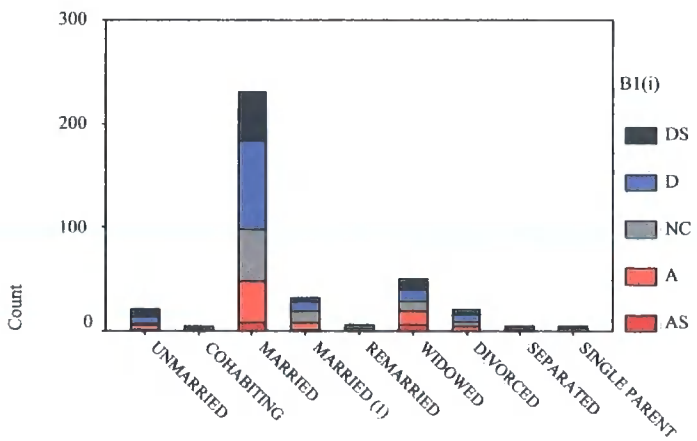

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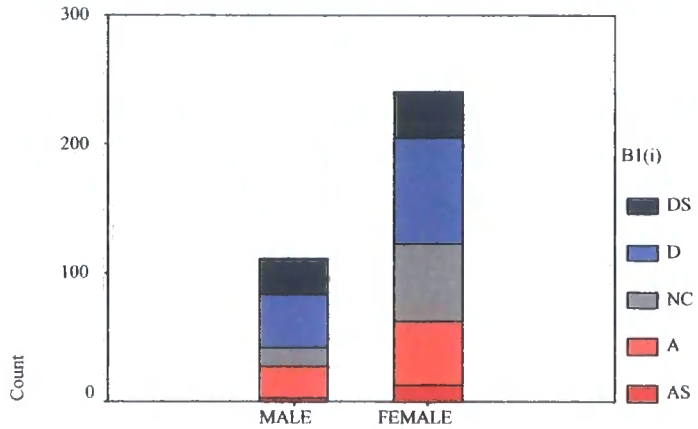

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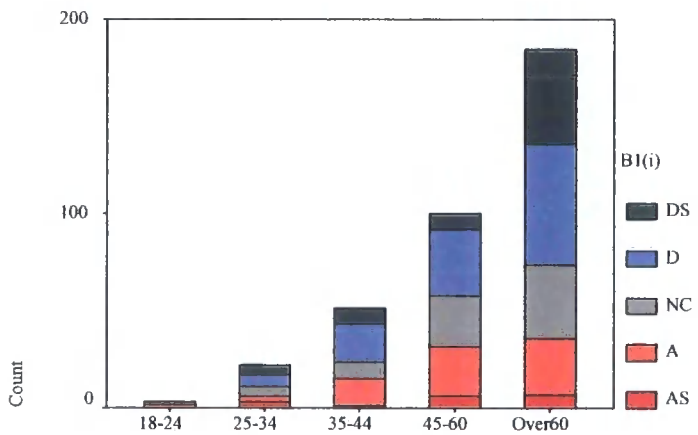
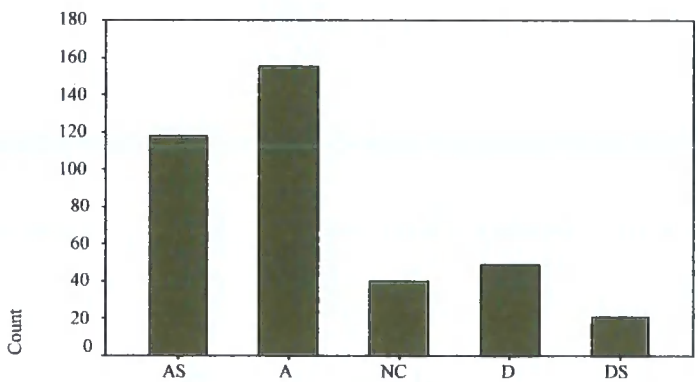


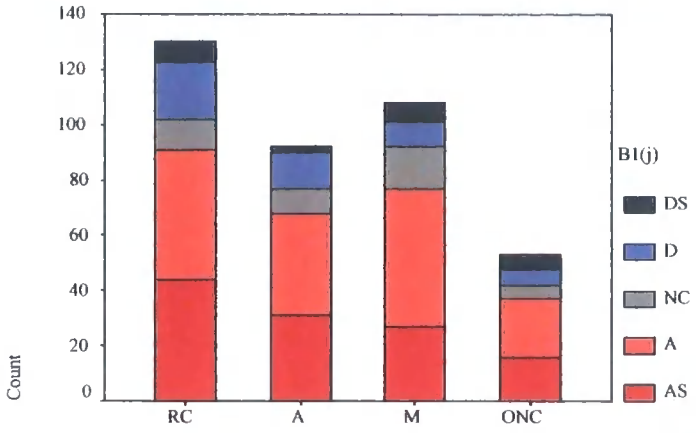
Sample Size: 361.

B1 (j) Cohabitation undermines the church's teaching on marriage.



B1(j) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 383.



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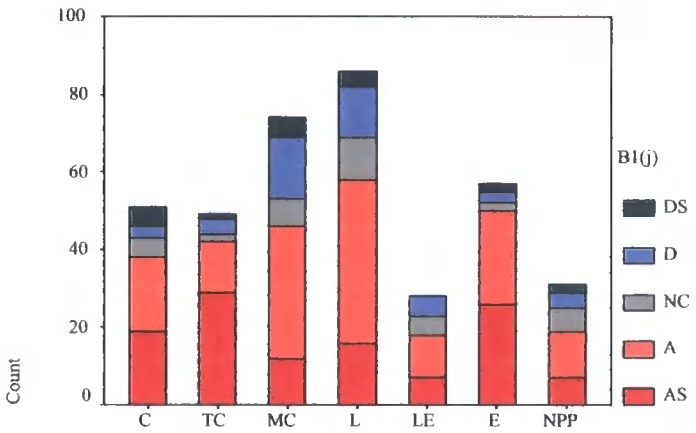

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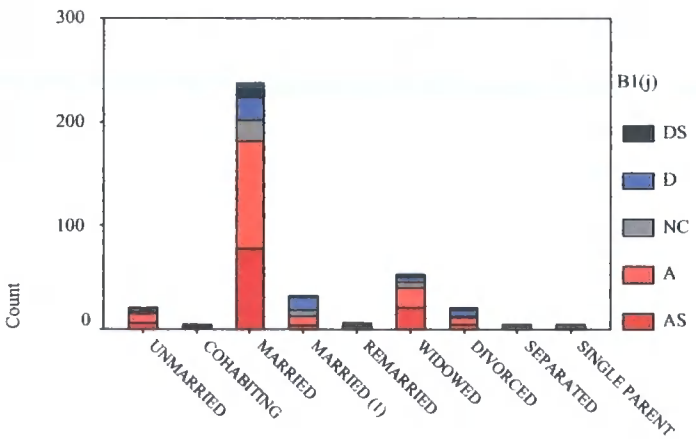

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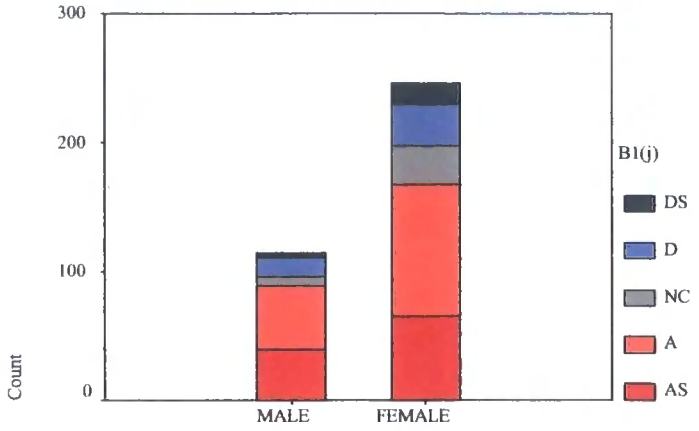

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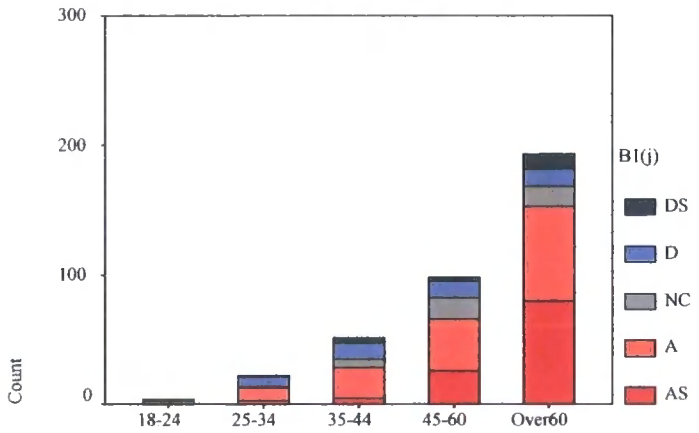
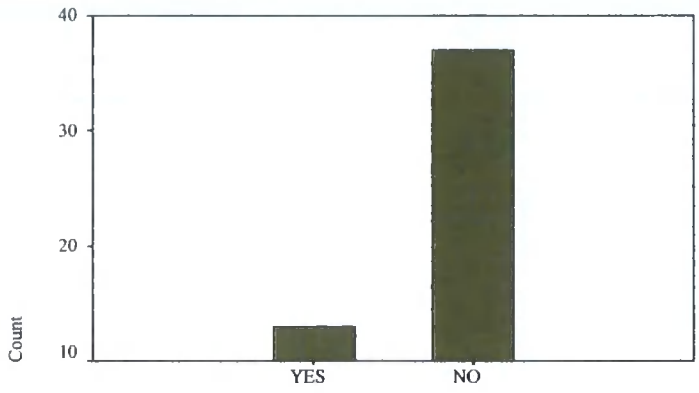


Sample Size: 368.

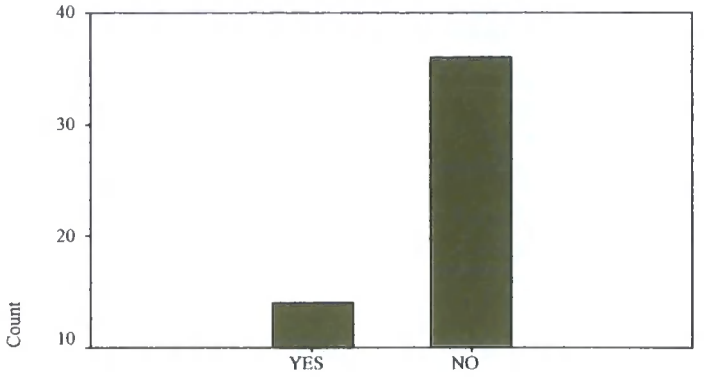
B2. If you are single with an expectation of marriage sometime in the future, would you be prepared to cohabit

(a) after announcing your engagement?



Sample Size: 50

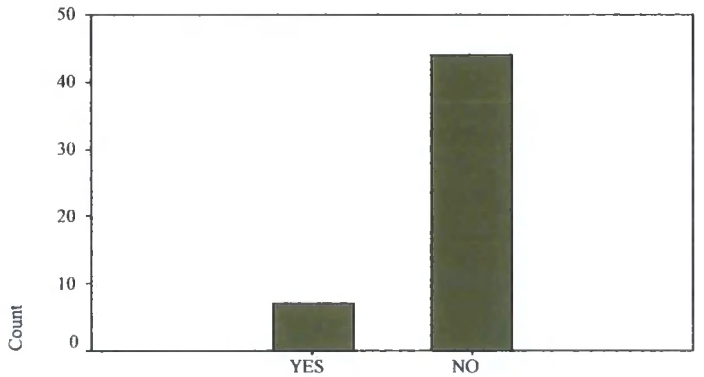
(b) after exchanging promises to marry, but not necessarily formally engaged?



B2(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 50.

(c) in an open ended relationship without any or with only minimal commitments?

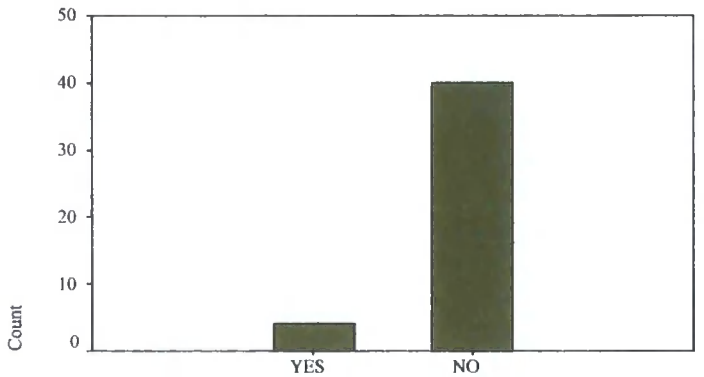


B2(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 51.

QB3. If you are single with an expectation of marriage sometime in the future, would you marry

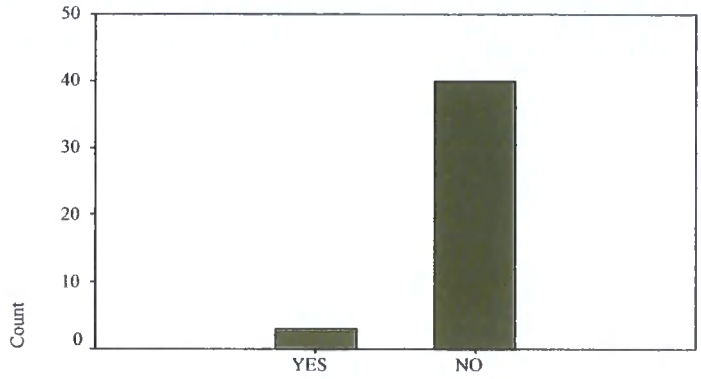
a) because of family pressure?



B3(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 44.

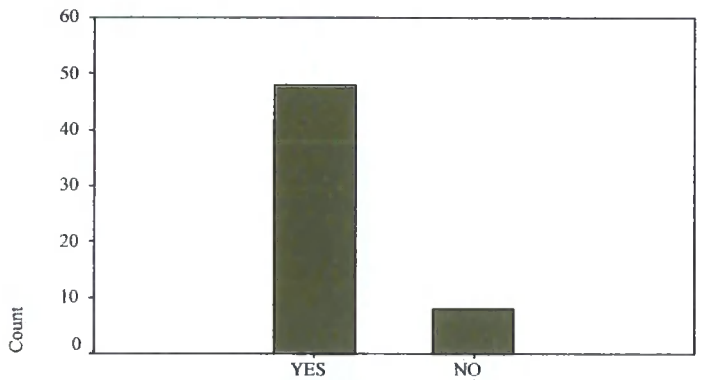
b) because of peer pressure?



B3(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 43.

c) because marriage is part of your Christian beliefs?

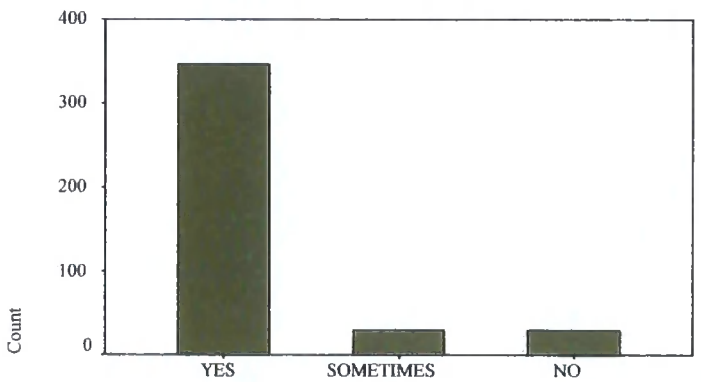


B3(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 56.

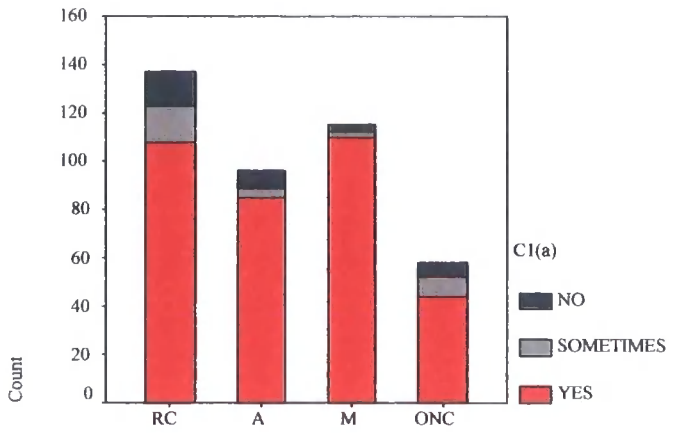
SECTION C - Cohabitation and Church Life.

C1. (a) As a Christian, do you personally accept couples who come to church but are living together as though married?



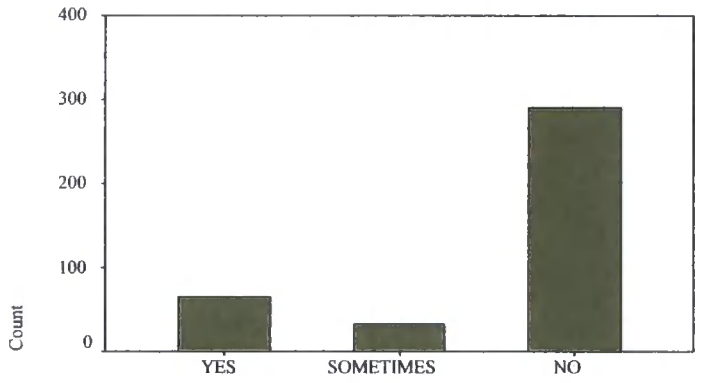
C1(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 406.



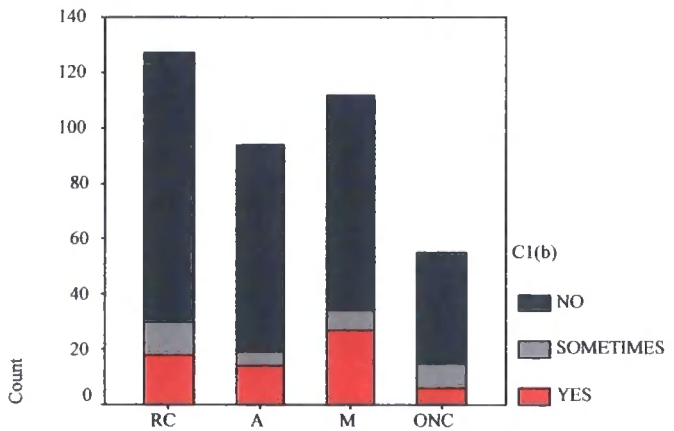
Sample Size: 406.

C1 (b) Are you more inclined to accept older people (e.g. widow(er)s, divorcees) living together as a married couple?



C1(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 388.



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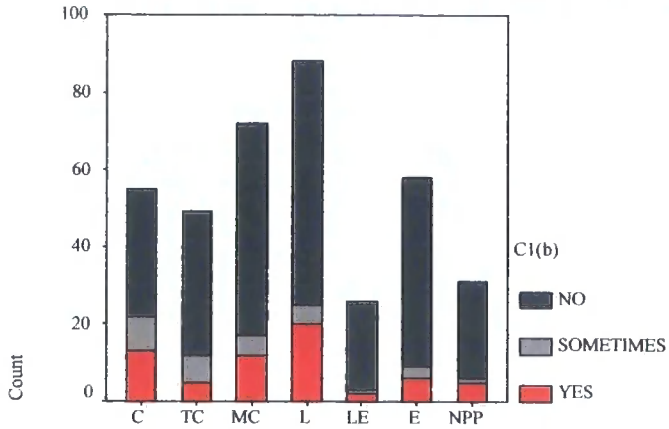

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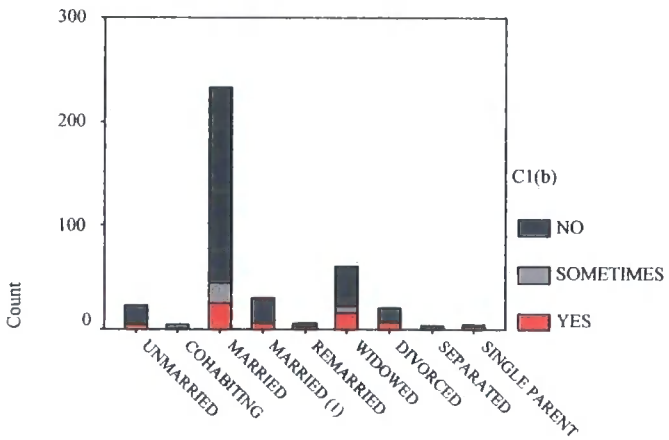

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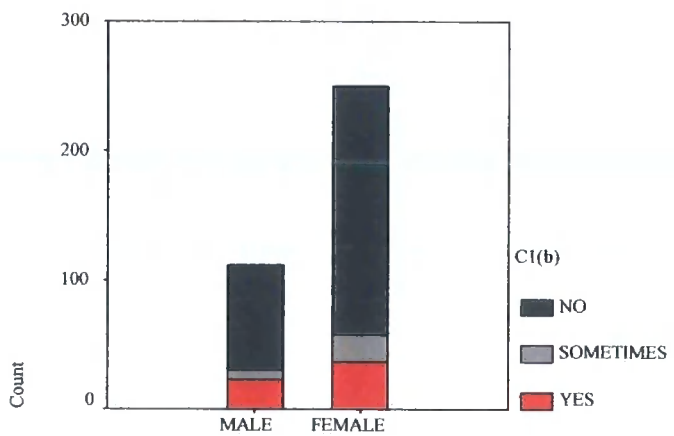

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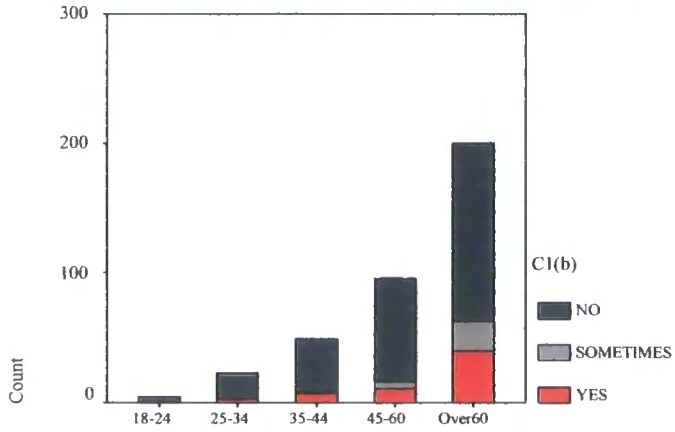
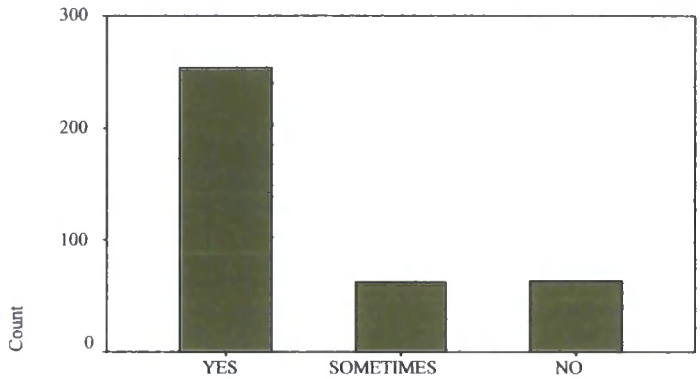


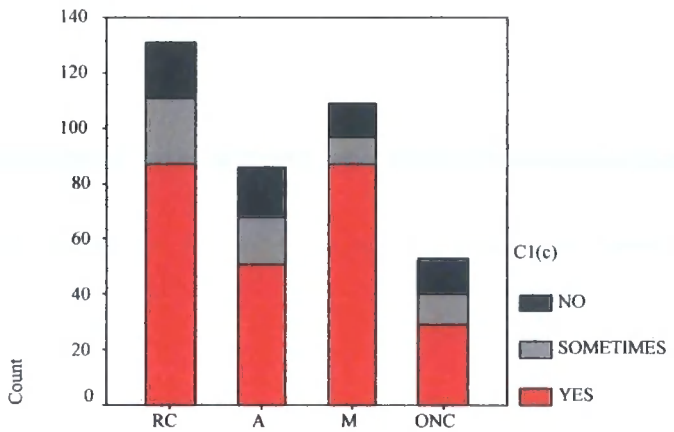
Sample Size: 372.

C1 (c) I consider another person's chosen lifestyle to be none of my business.



C1(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 379.



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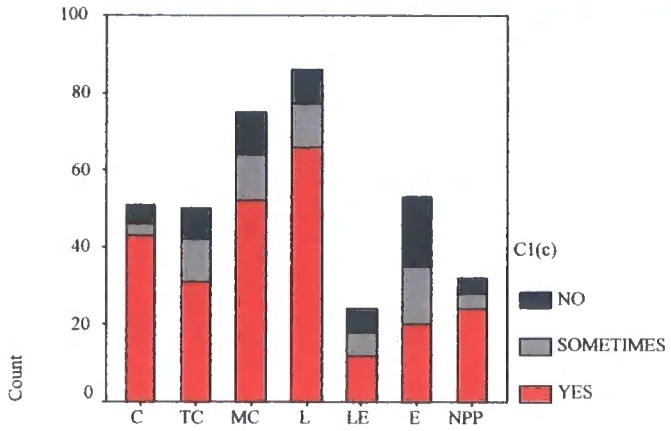

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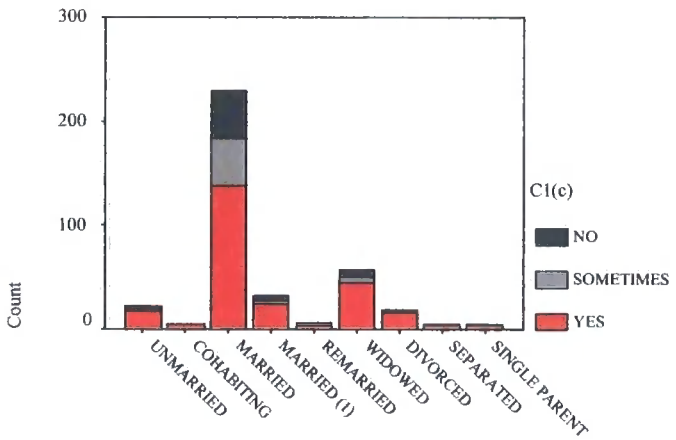

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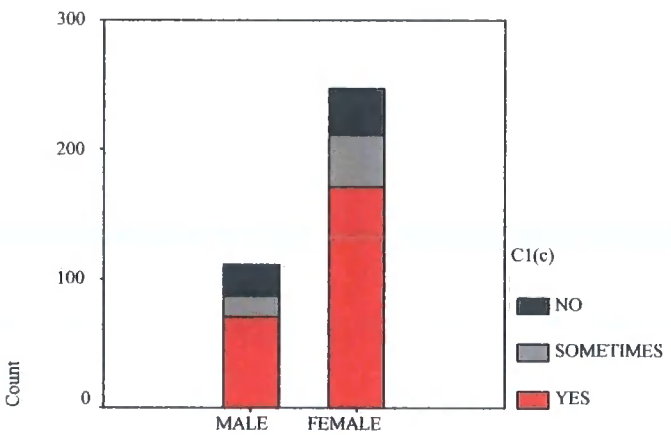
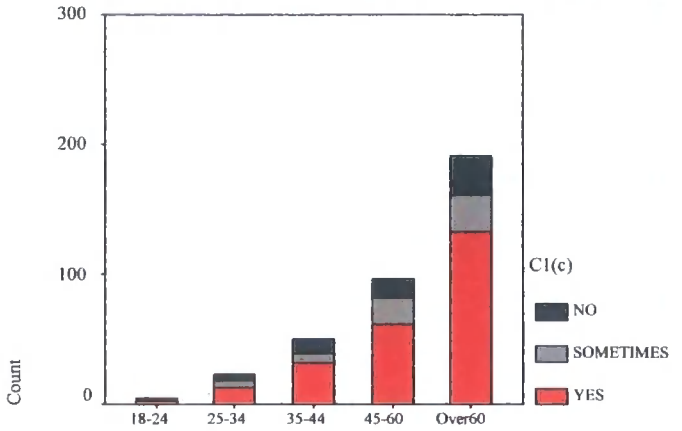


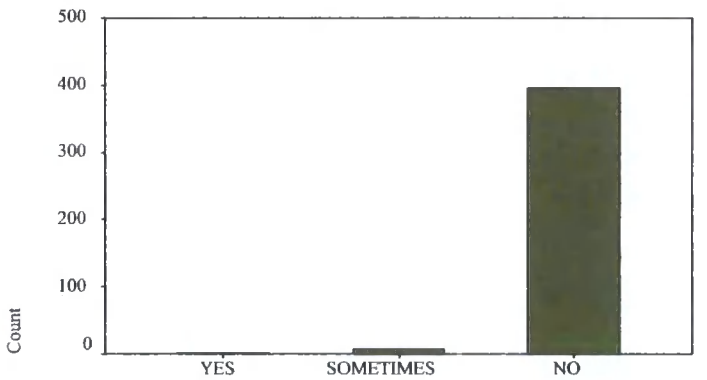
Sample Size: 358.



Sample Size: 365.

C2. Would you consider leaving for another church if a couple in your congregation were openly cohabiting

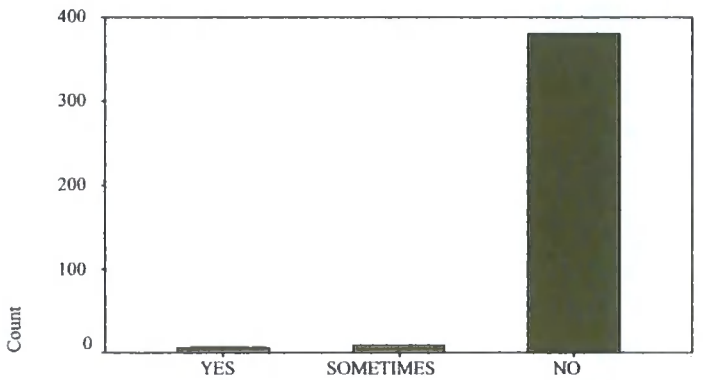
(a) with a declared intention to marry?



C2(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 408.

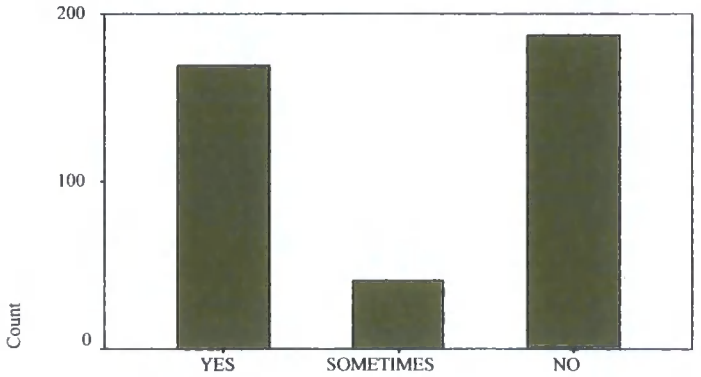
C2 (b) with no declared intention to marry?



C2(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

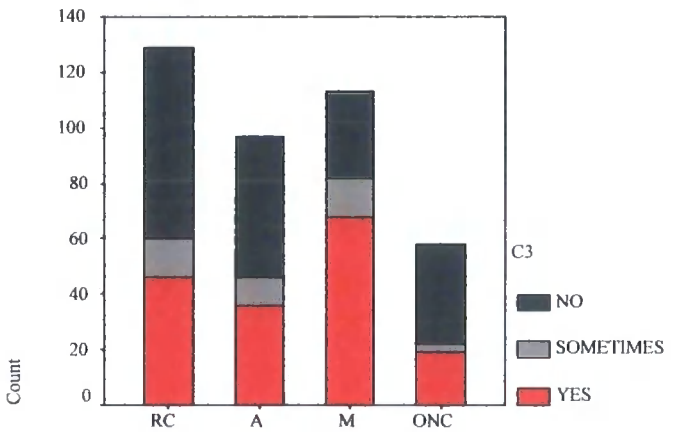
Sample Size: 405.

C3. Do you believe that a person who is cohabiting could be elected to office within your church?

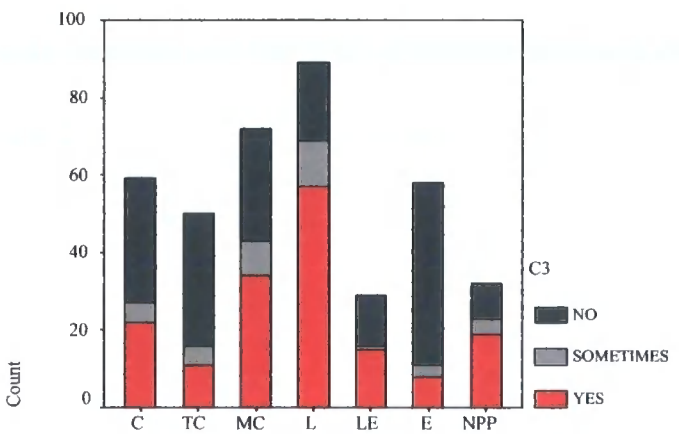


C3 - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 397.



Sample Size: 397.



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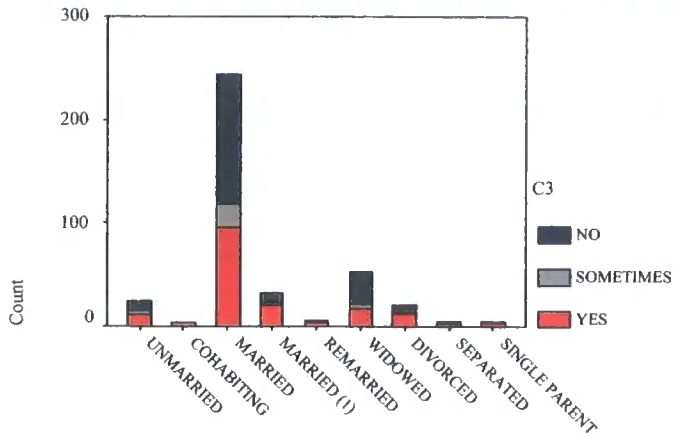

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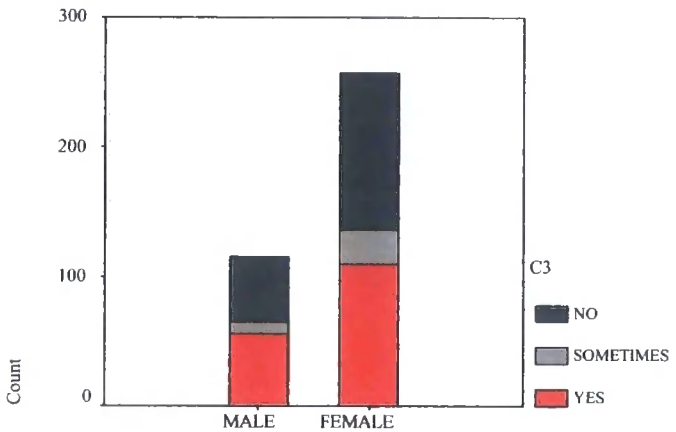

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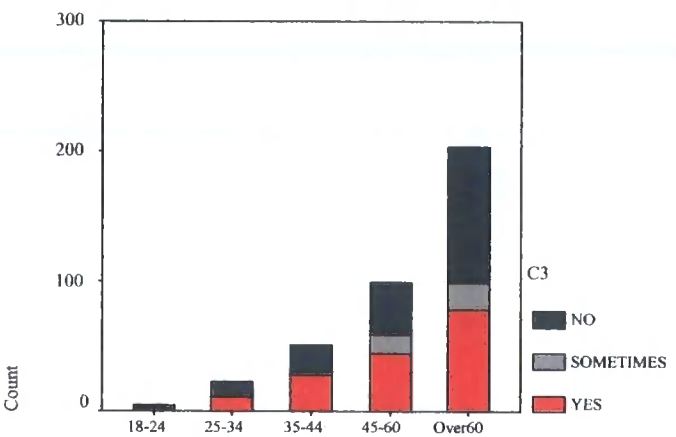
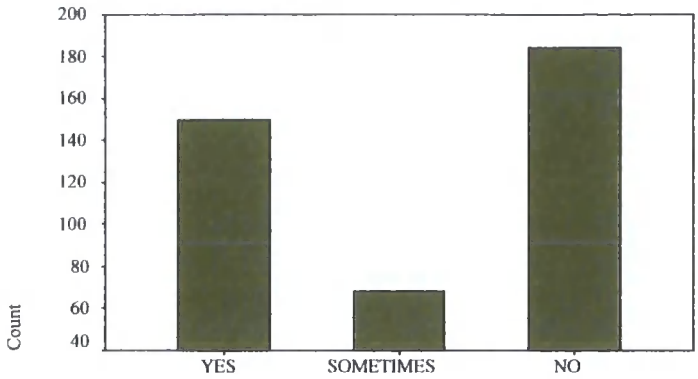


Sample Size: 382.

C4. Do you believe that a person who is cohabiting could be an acceptable as a Sunday School teacher?



C4 - TOTAL RESPONSE

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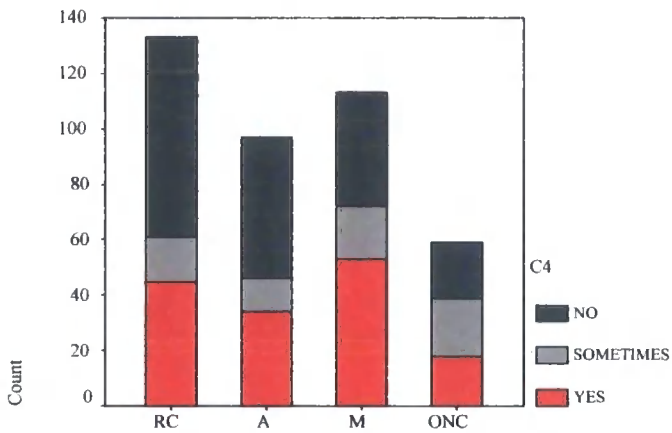

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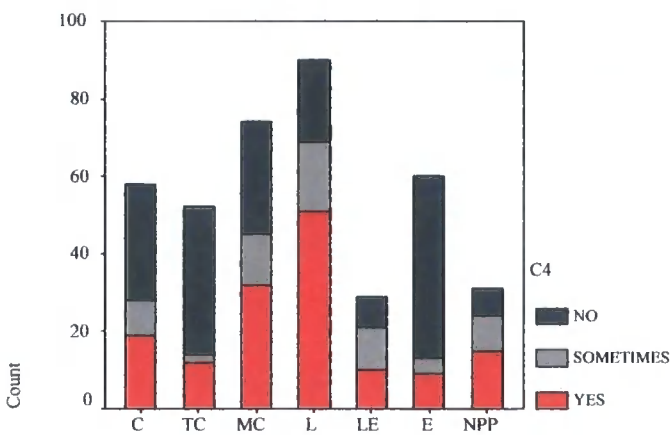

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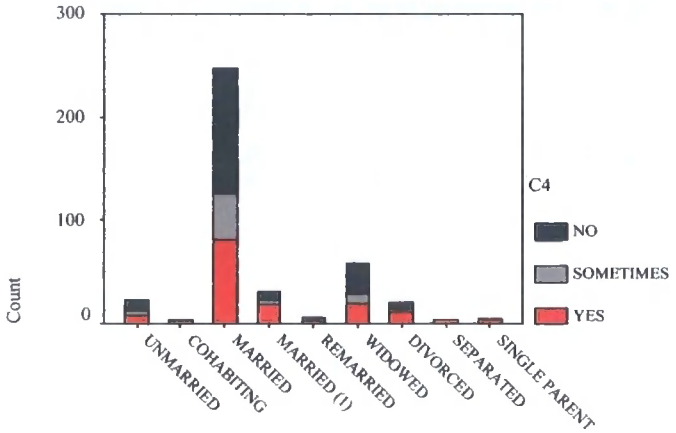

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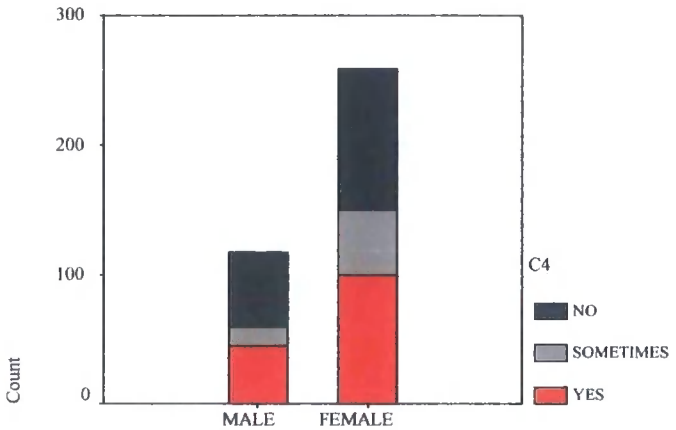

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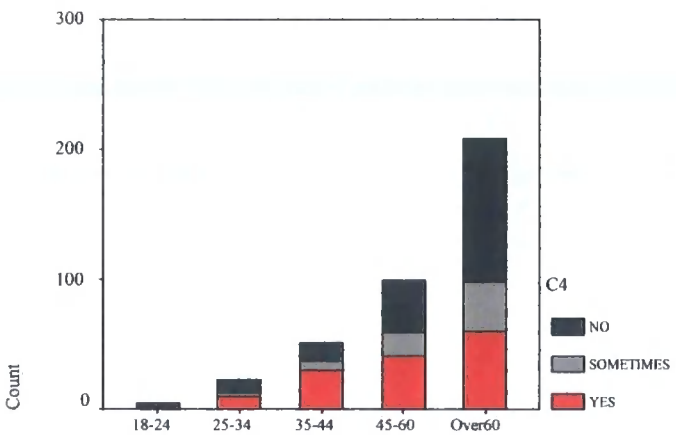
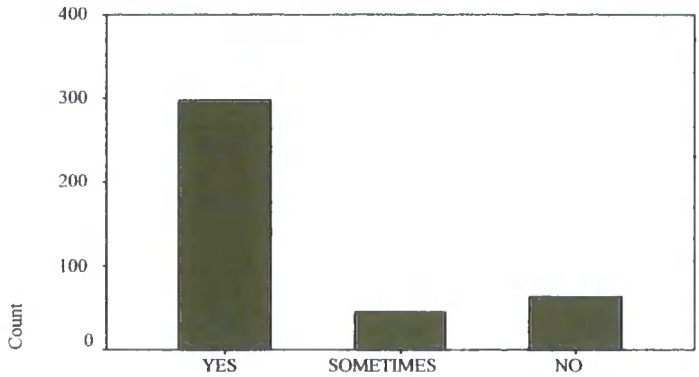


Sample Size: 386.

C5. If a couple in the congregation are cohabiting with no intention to marry, should the church encourage them towards marriage?



C5 - TOTAL RESPONSE

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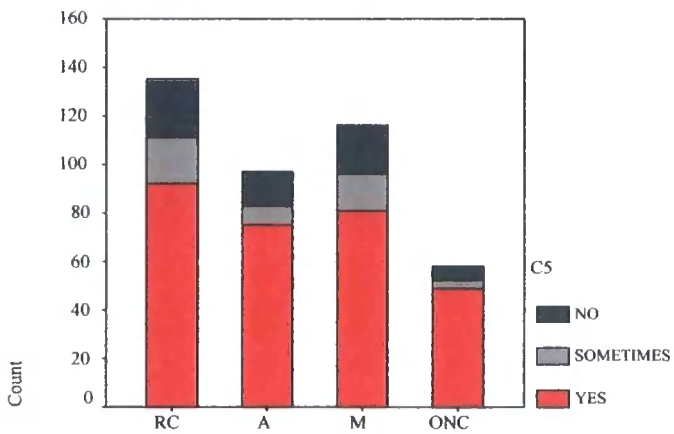

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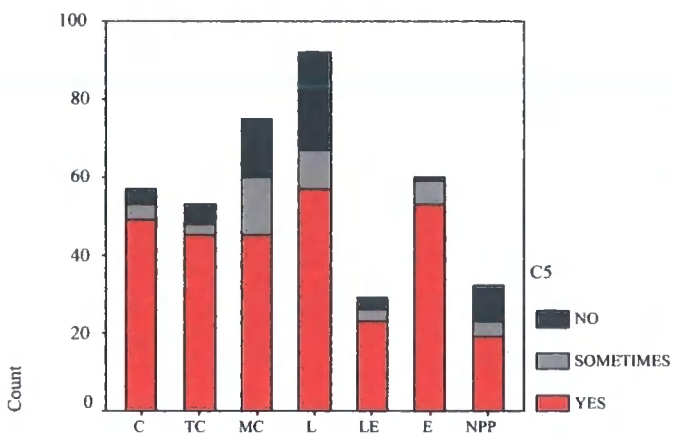

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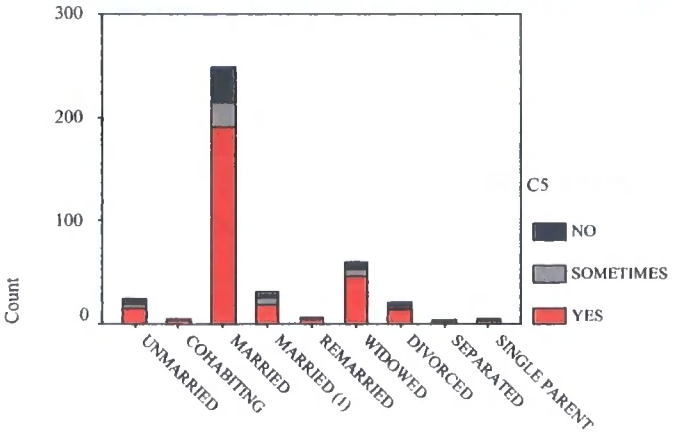

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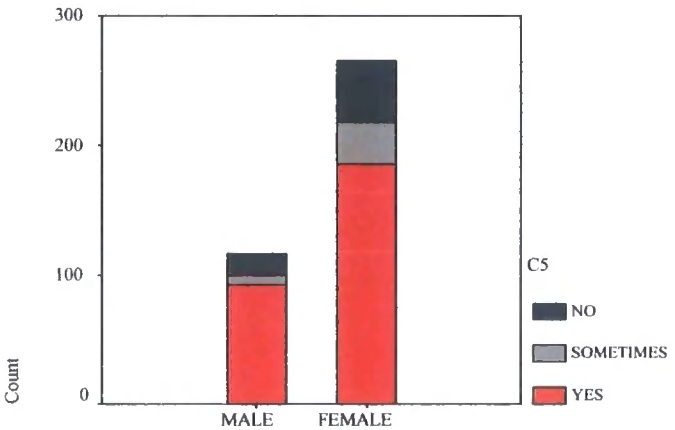

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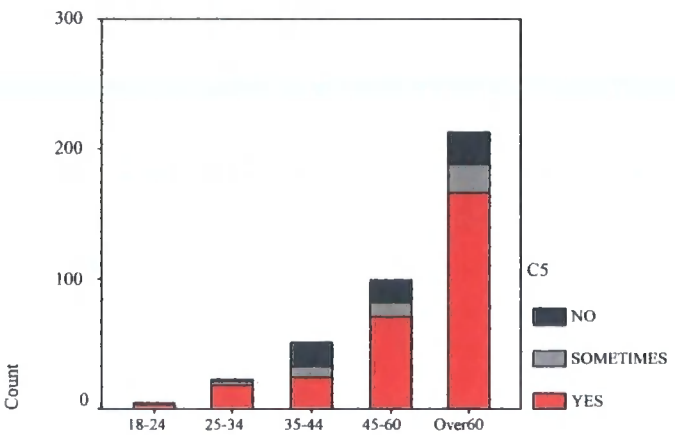
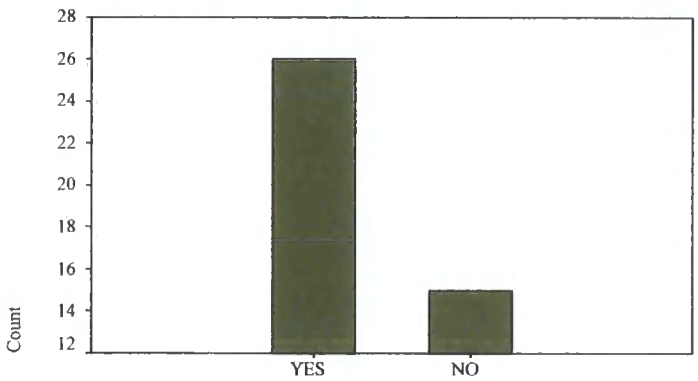


Sample Size: 391.

C6. If you are cohabiting or have cohabited, how were you received in your church?

(a) Is/ was your status known to others in the congregation?



C6(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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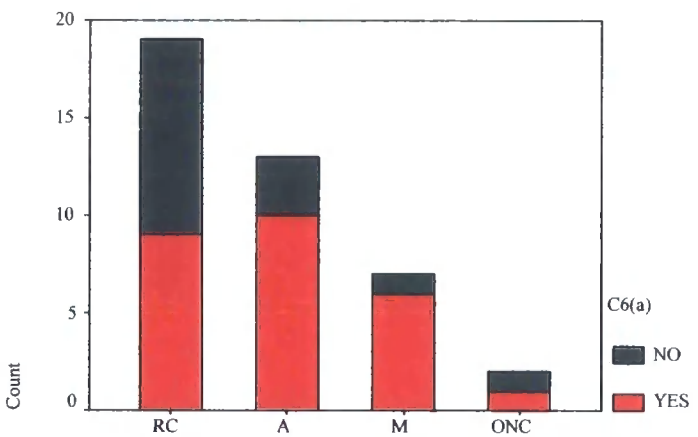

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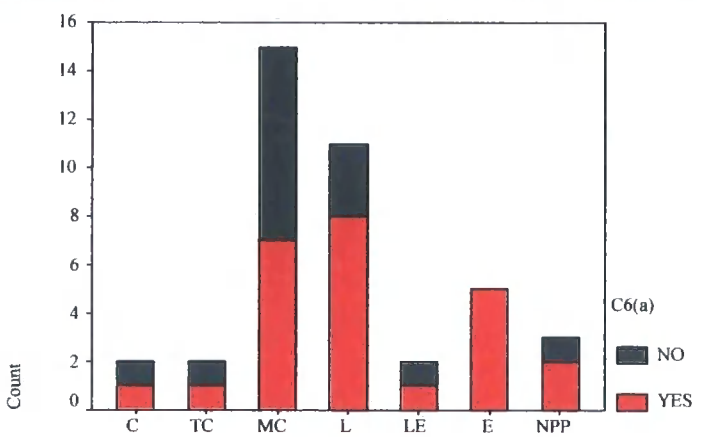

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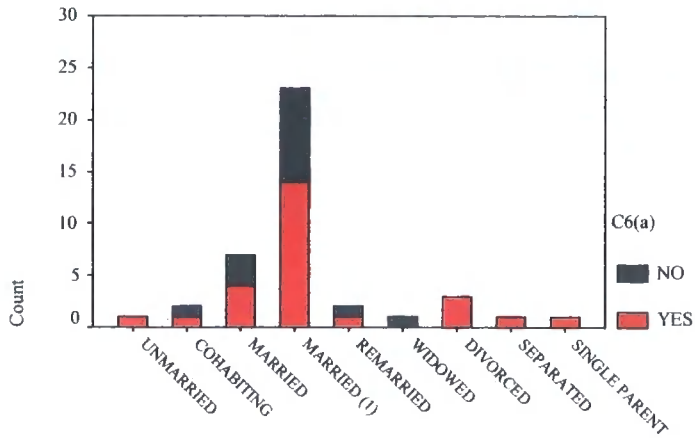

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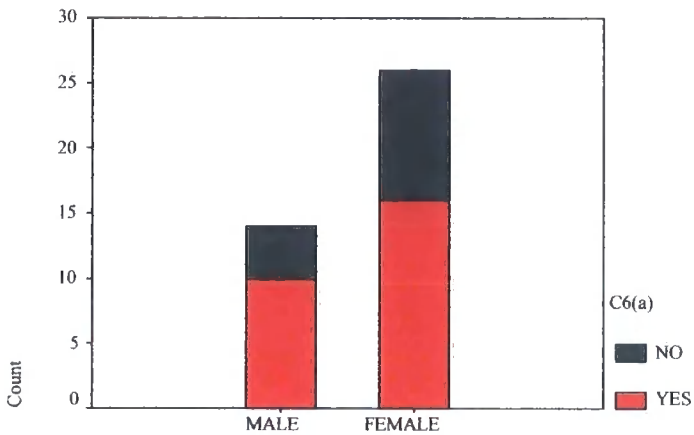

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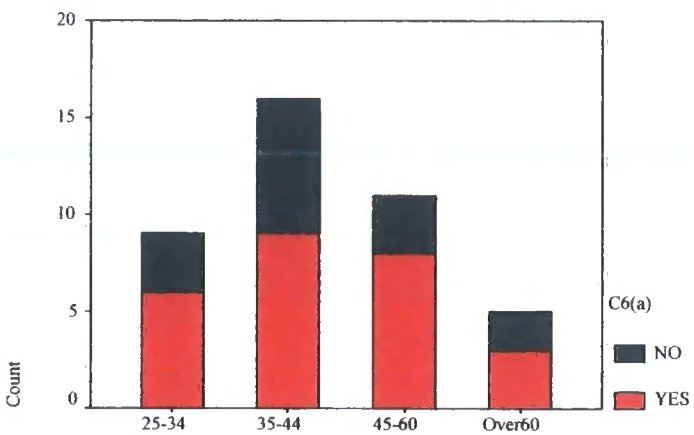
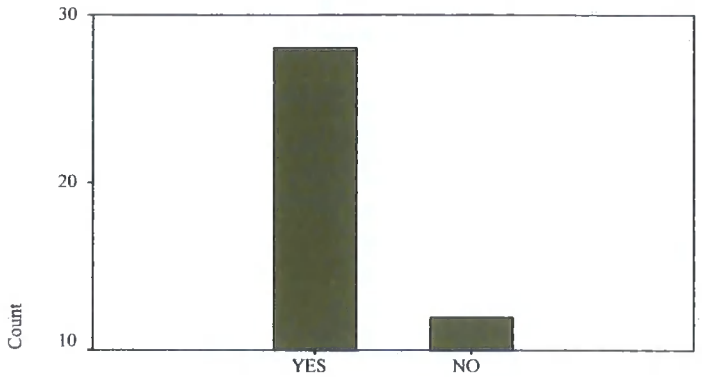


Sample Size: 41.

(b) Do/did you feel able to conduct your relationship openly and without recrimination from the clergy?



C6(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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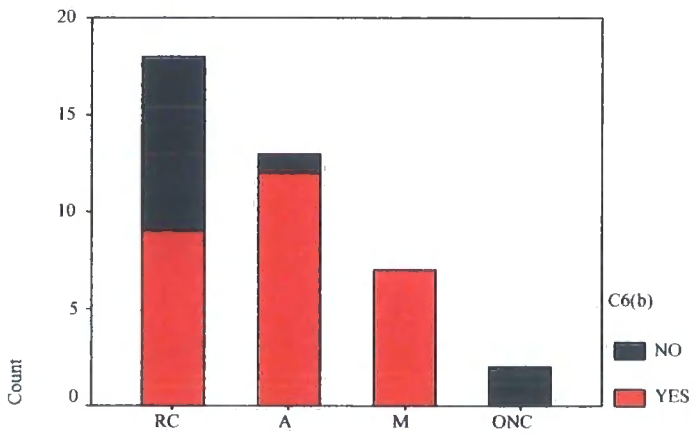

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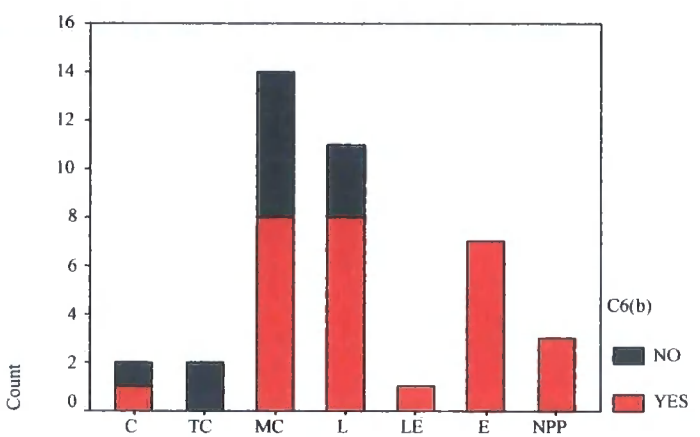

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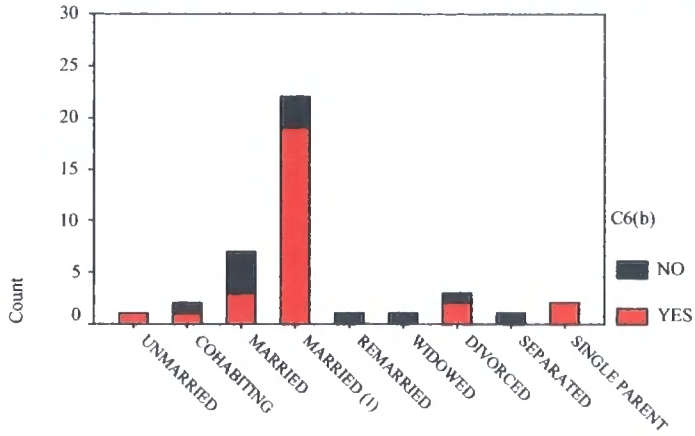

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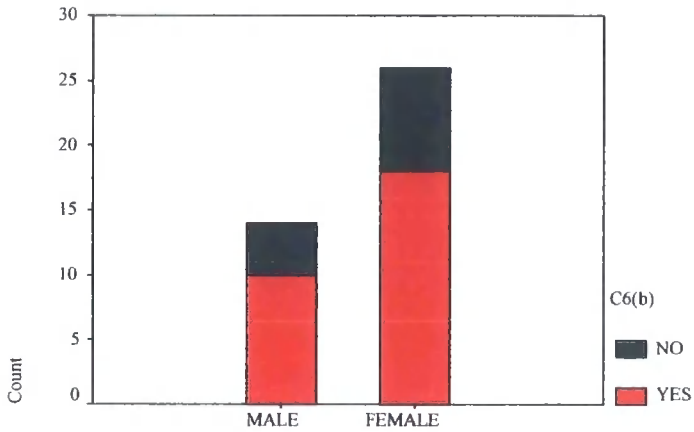

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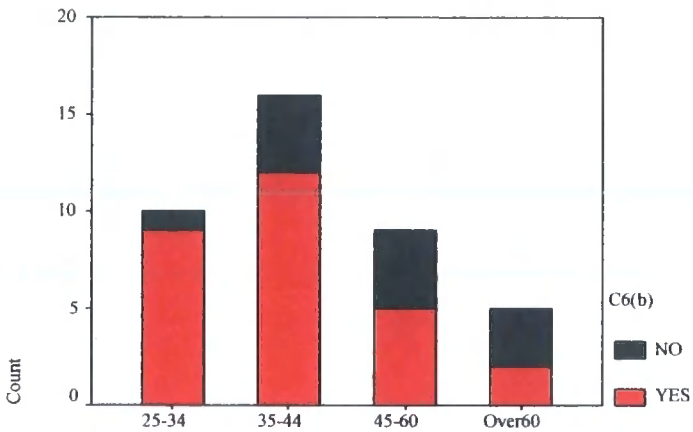

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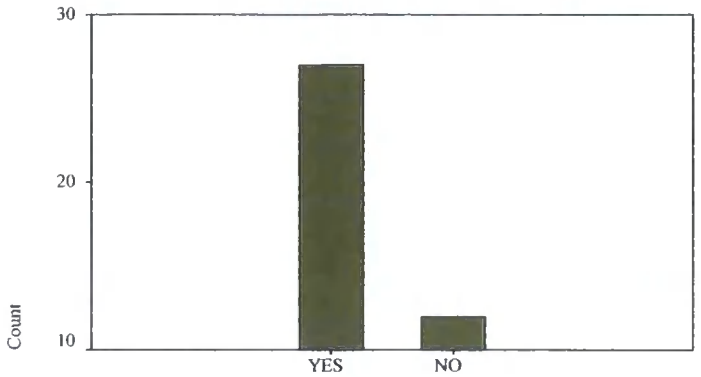
(c) Do/did you feel able to conduct your relationship openly and without recrimination from the congregation?



C6(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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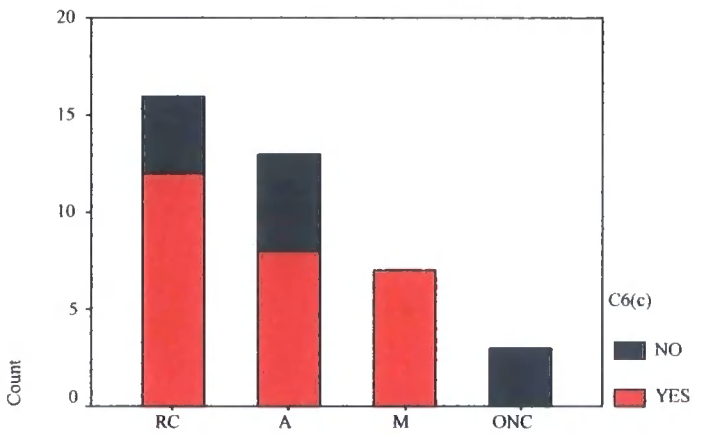

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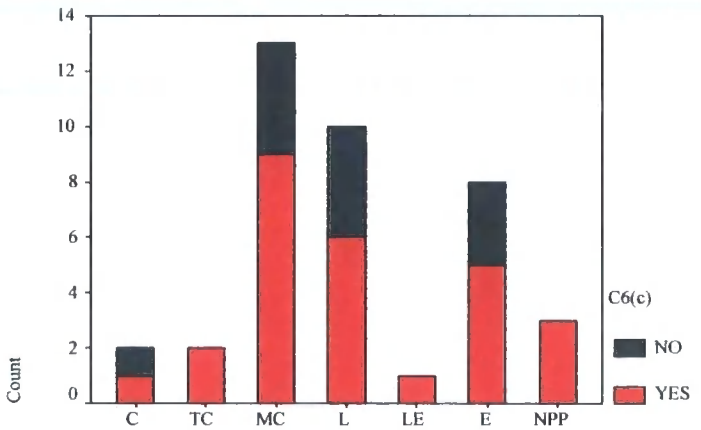

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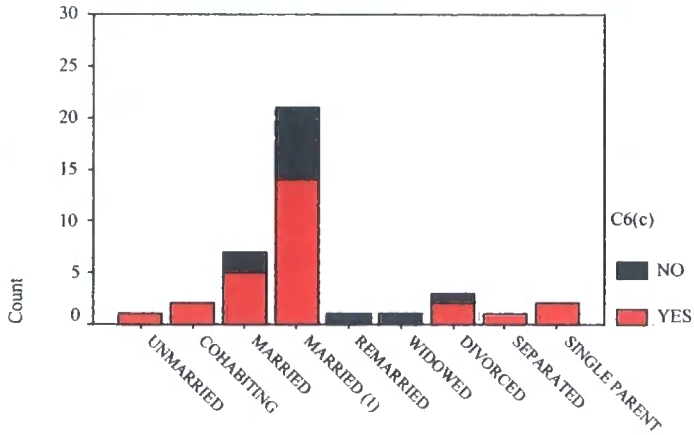

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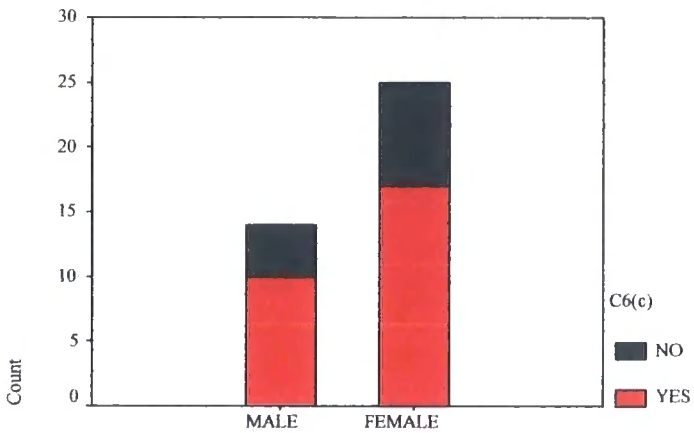

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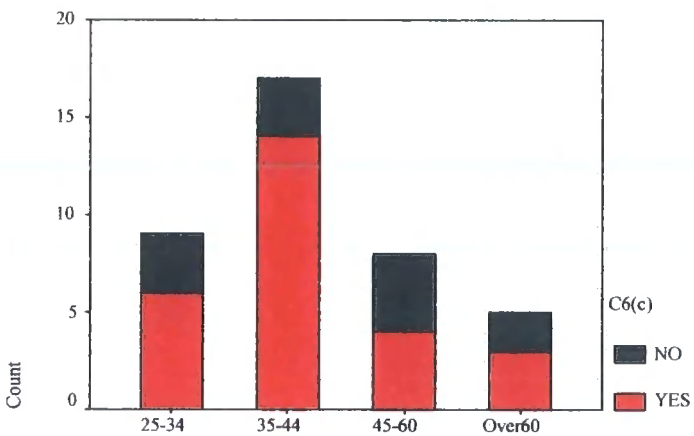
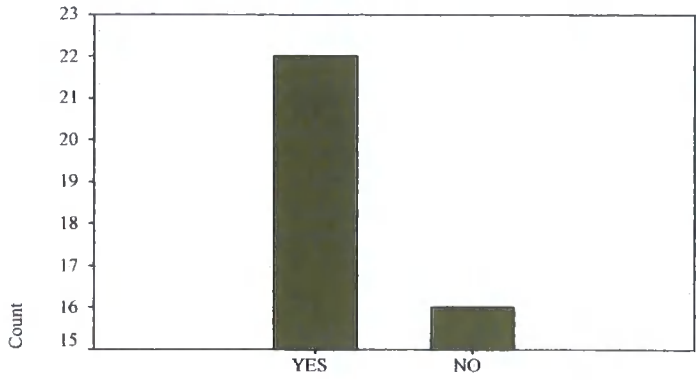


Sample Size: 39.

(d) Would/did you consider moving to another congregation if the present one showed disapproval?



C6(d) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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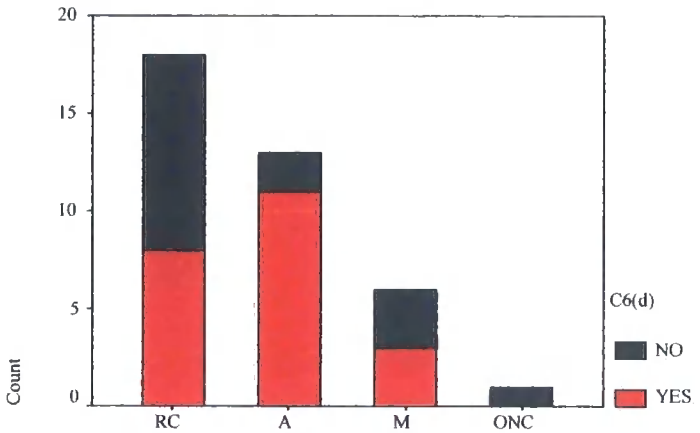

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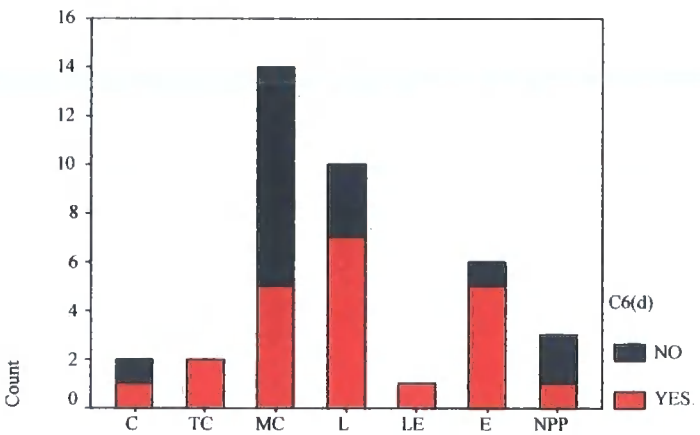

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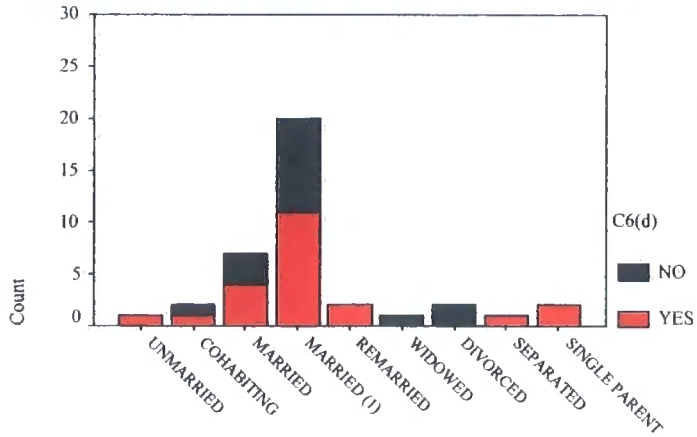

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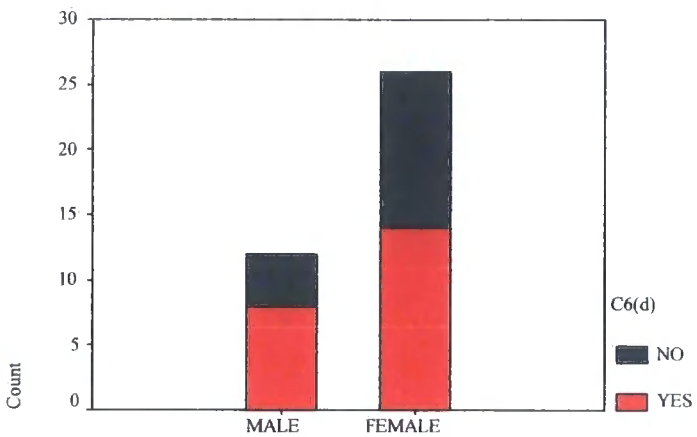

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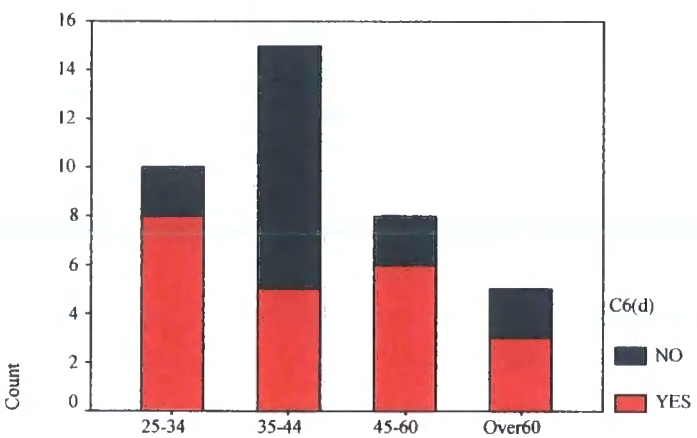

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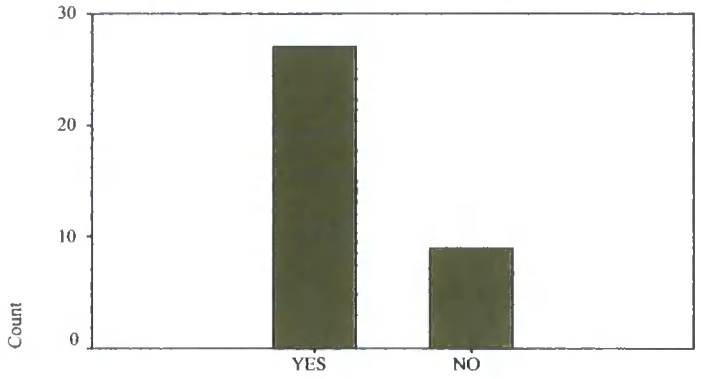
(e) Are/were you treated as a couple rather than as two single people, albeit good friends?



C6(e) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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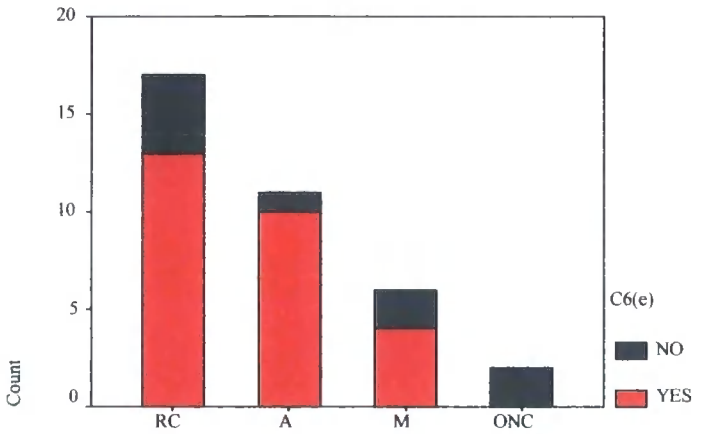

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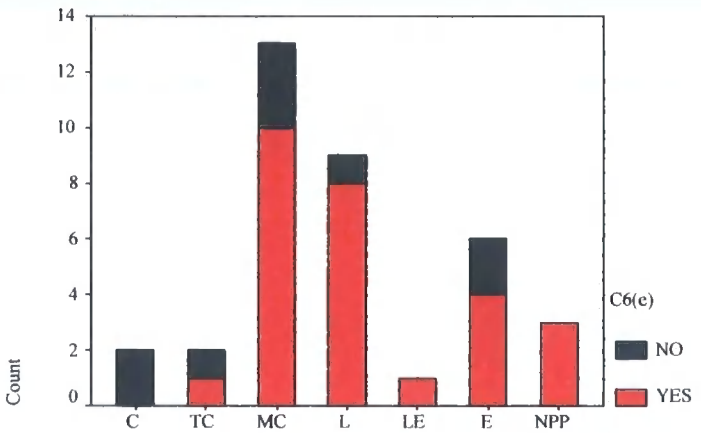

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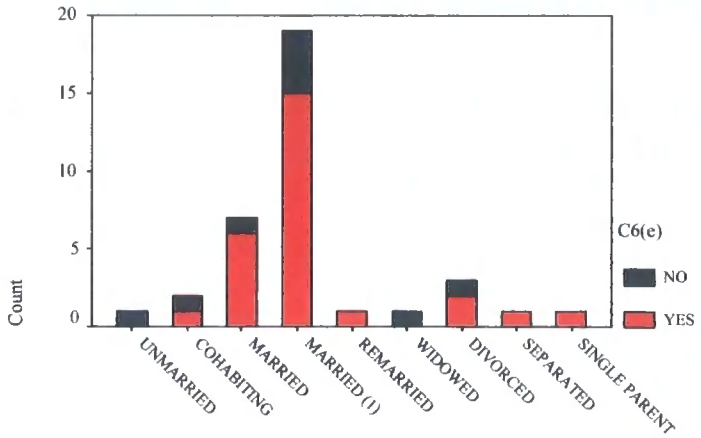

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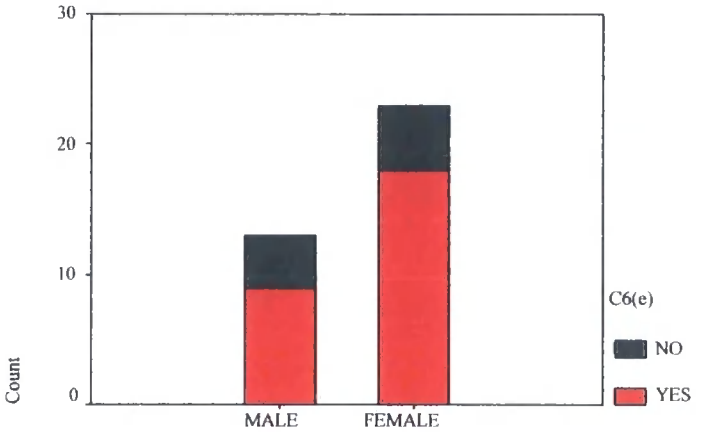

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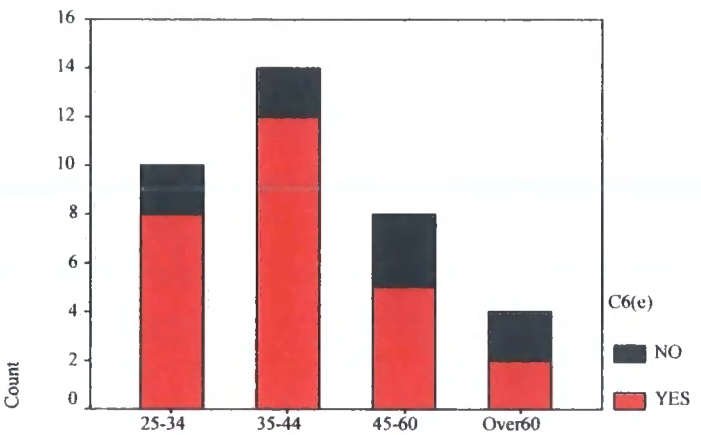
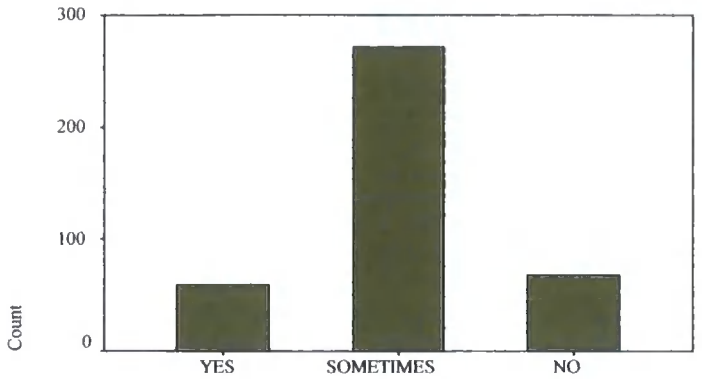


Sample Size: 36.

SECTION D: Ways Forward.

D1. Cohabitation is contrary to the church's traditional stance on marriage. Is the church's teaching on marriage now out of date?



D1 - TOTAL RESPONSE

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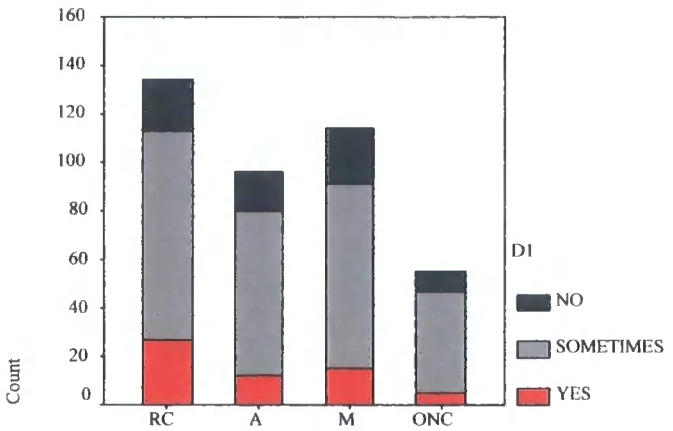

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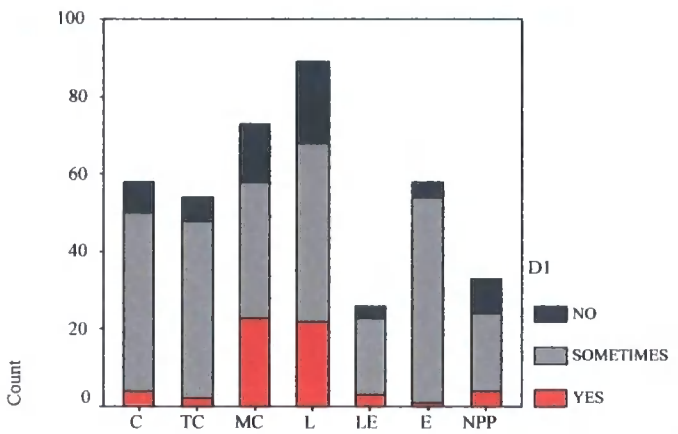
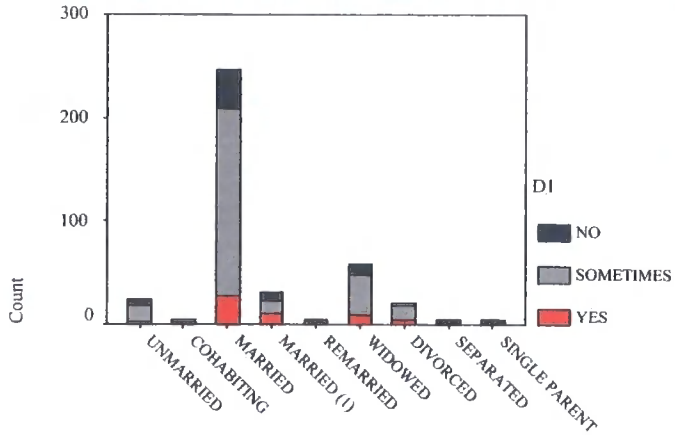


Sample Size: 391.



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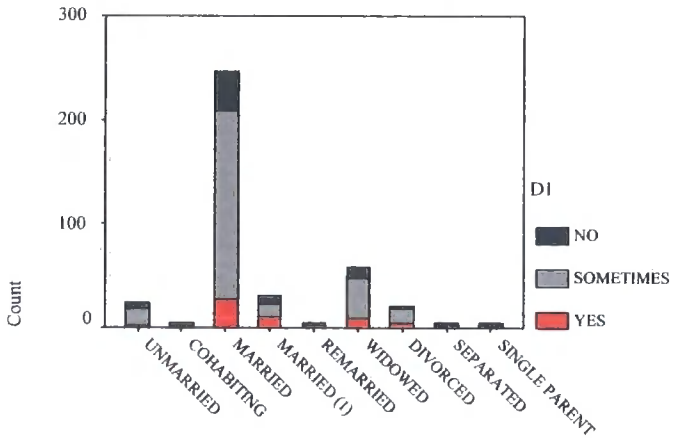

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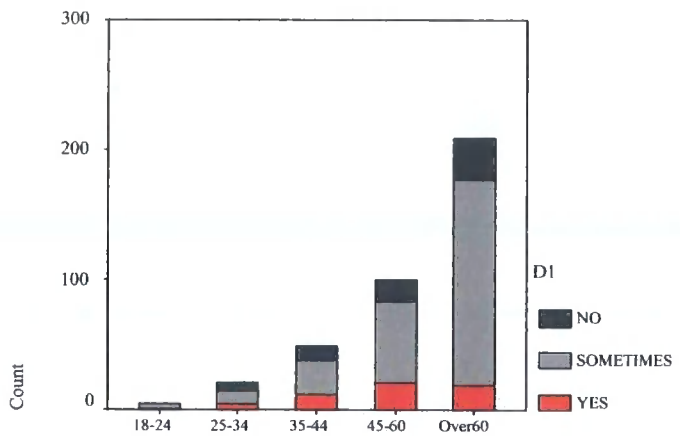
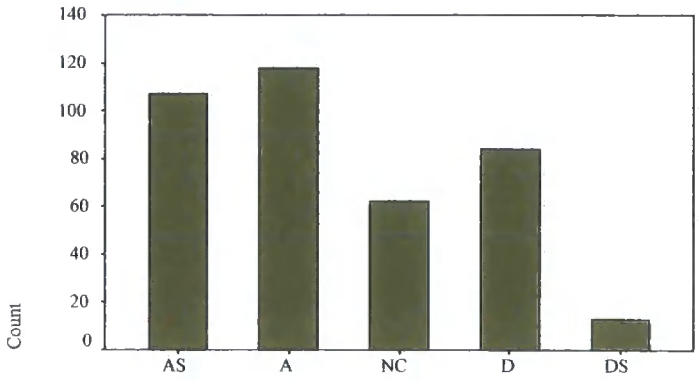


Sample Size: 384.

If YES, how do you think it should be modernised?

Specific comments received here are included in Chapter 7 and discussed further in Chapter 8.

D2 (a) Cohabitation by avowed Christians weakens the church's authority in society.



D2(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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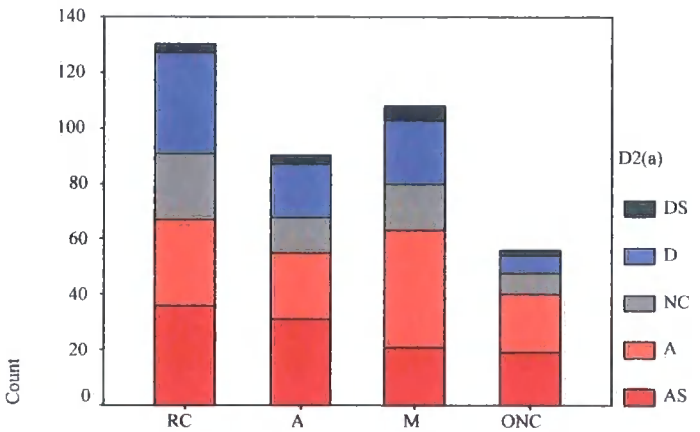

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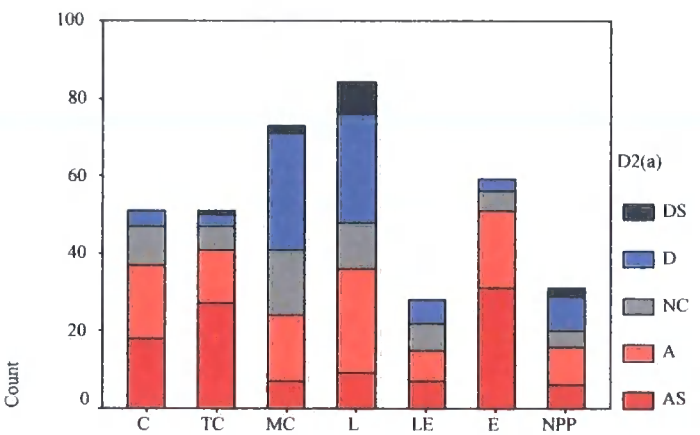

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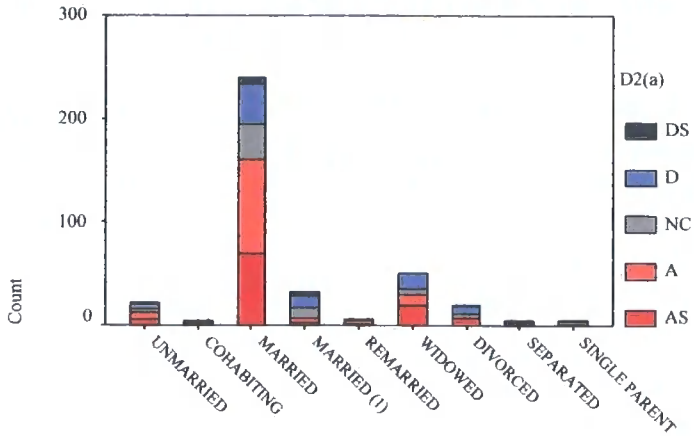

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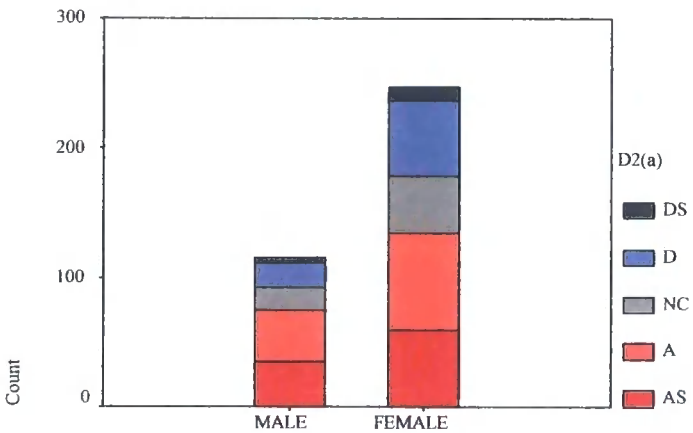

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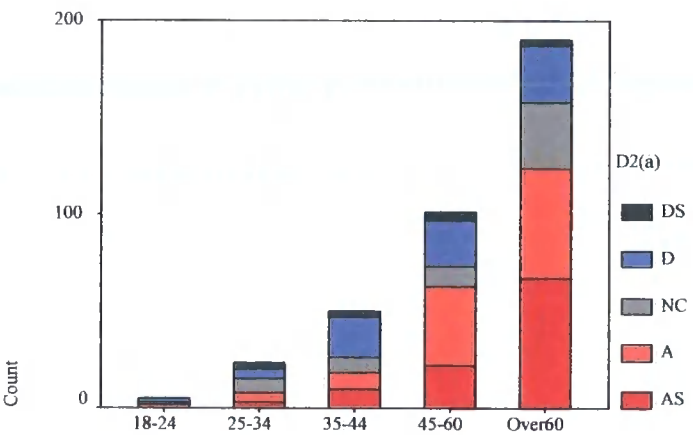

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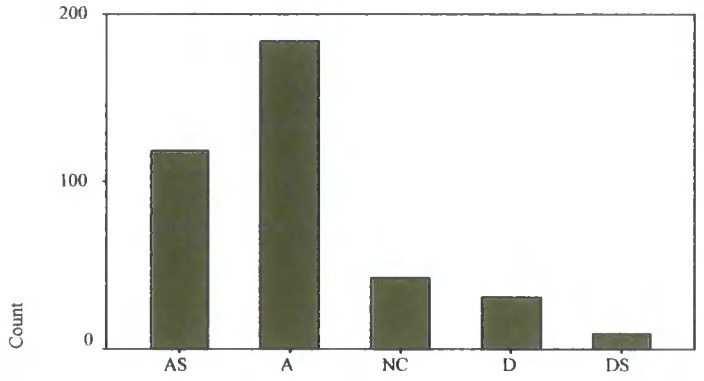
D2 (b) The church should expand its teaching on marriage.



D2(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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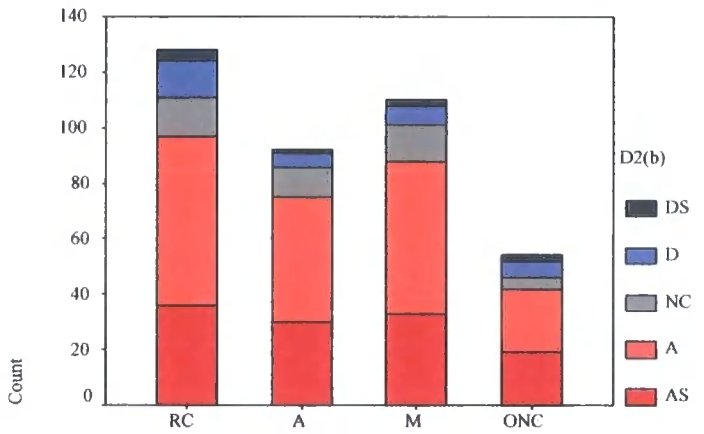

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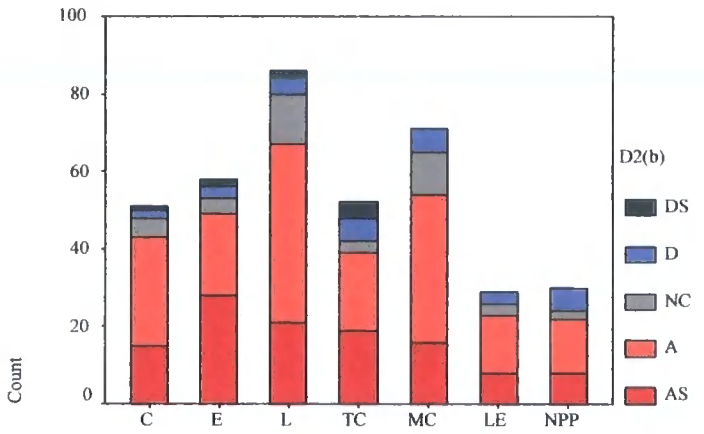

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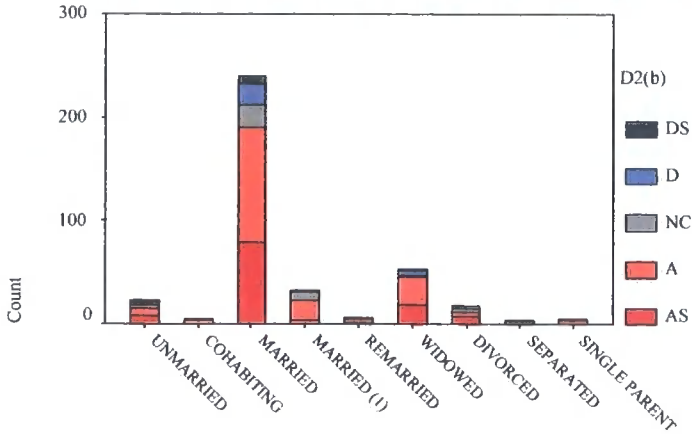

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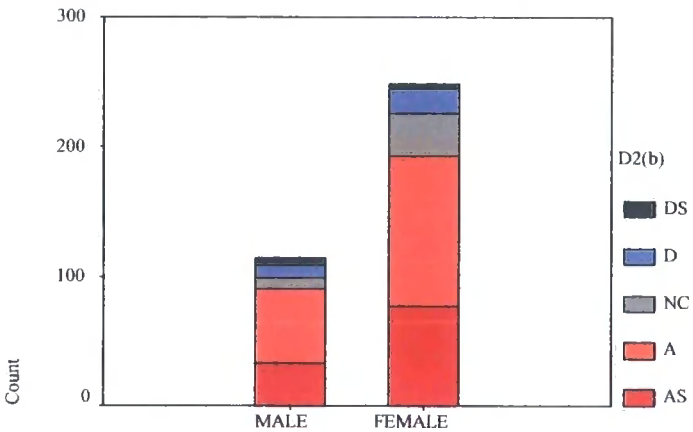

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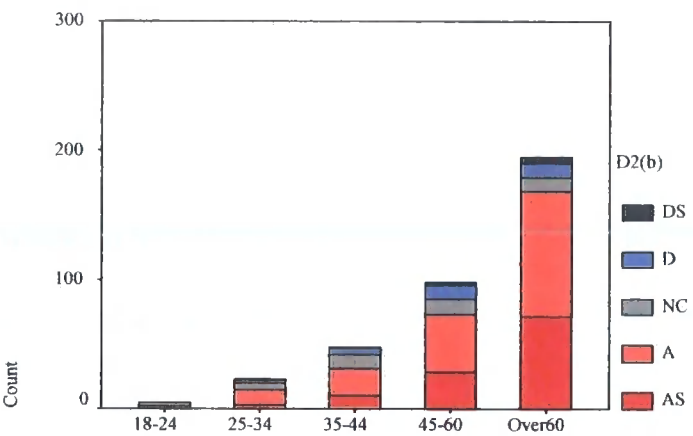

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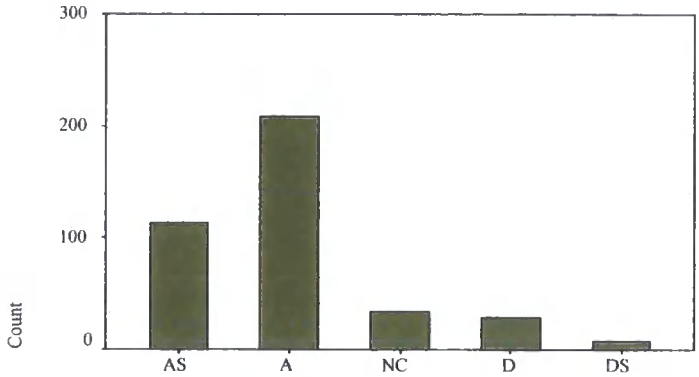
D2 (c) The church should find ways to encourage cohabitating couples move towards marriage.



D2(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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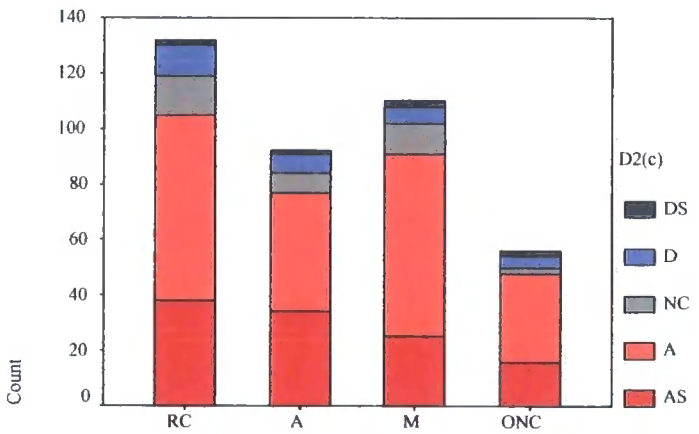

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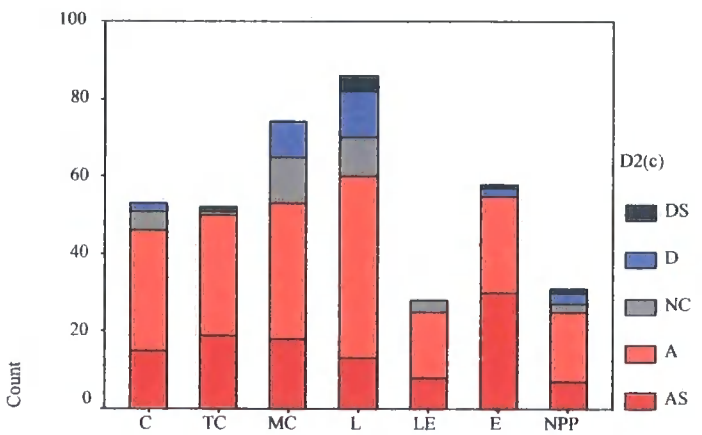

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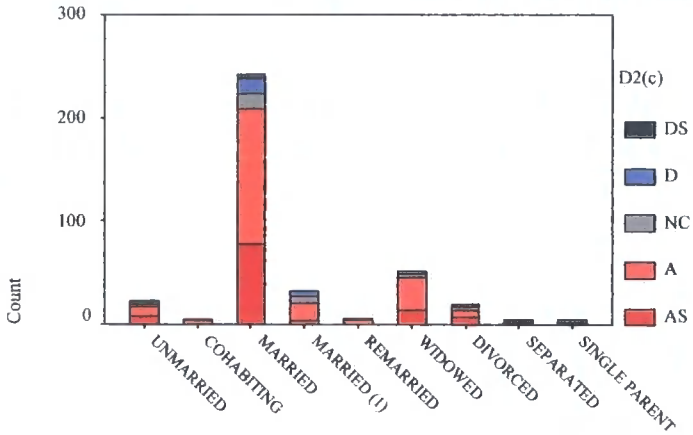

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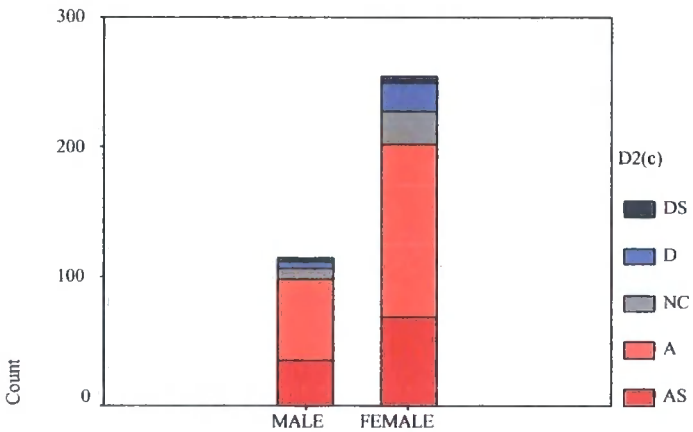

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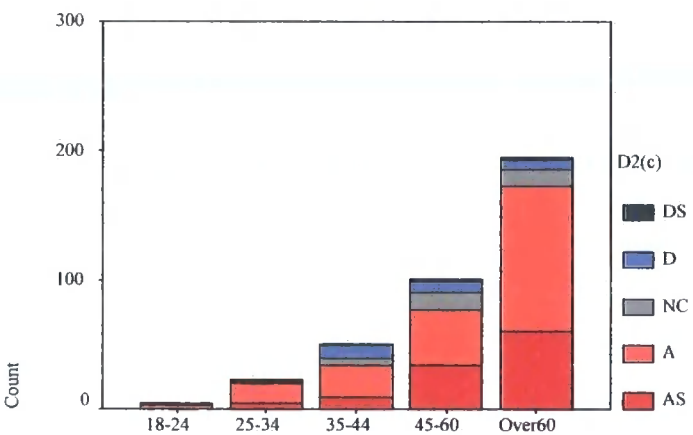
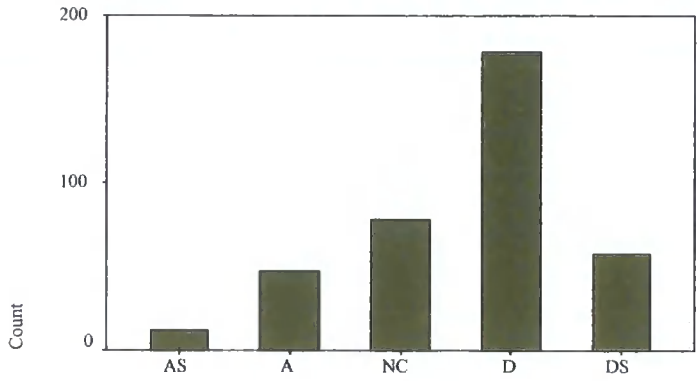


Sample Size: 374.

D2 (d) The church should accept cohabitation only where there is a commitment to marry.



D2(d) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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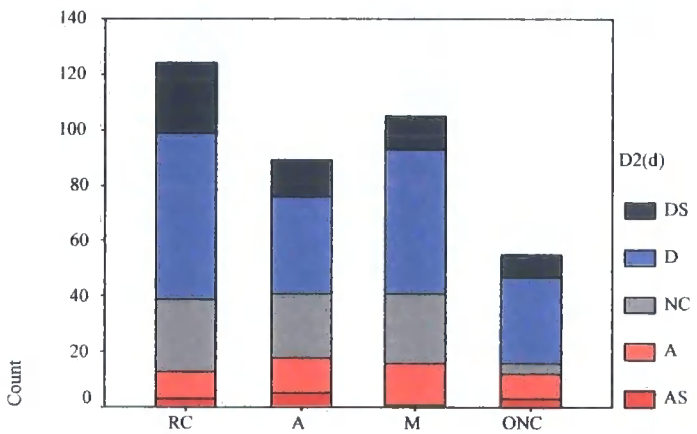

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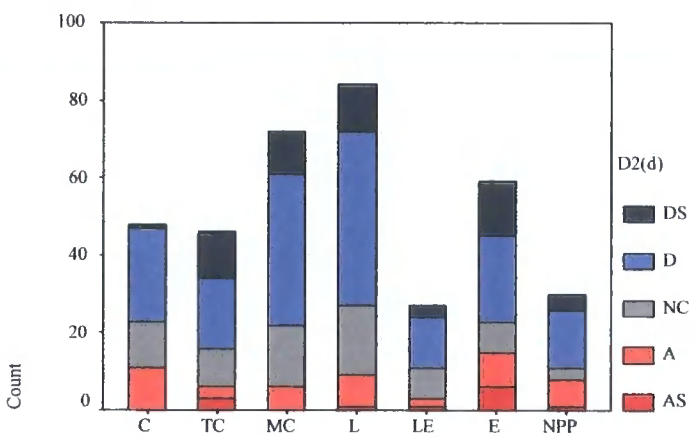

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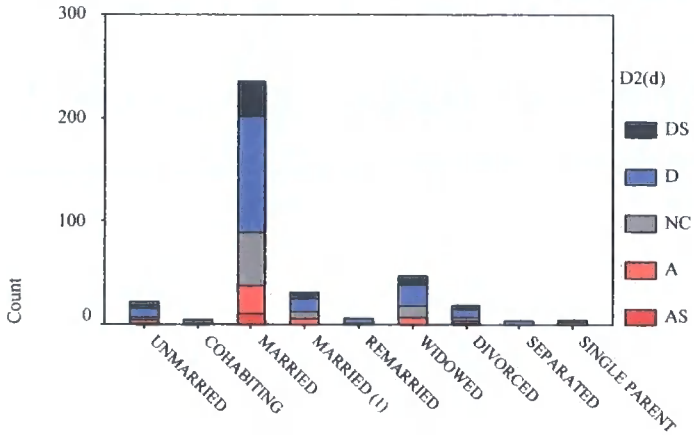

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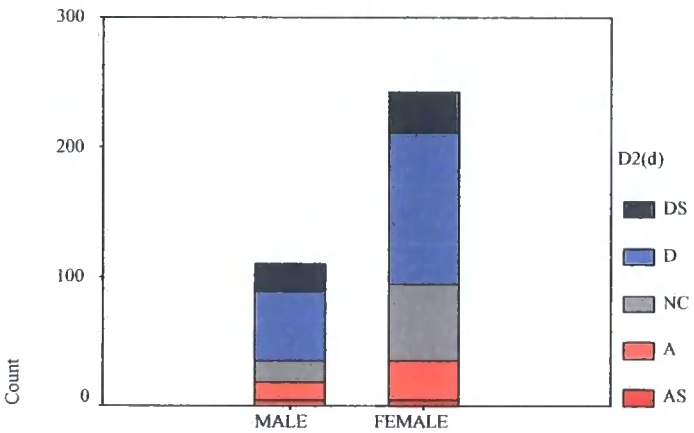

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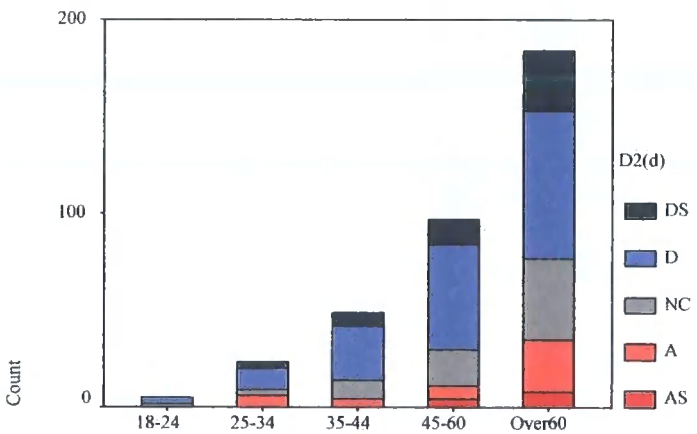

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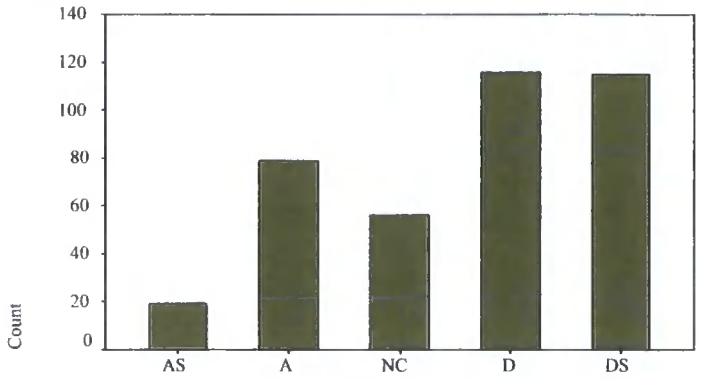
D2 (e) The church should just accept that cohabitation is part of today's lifestyle.



D2(e) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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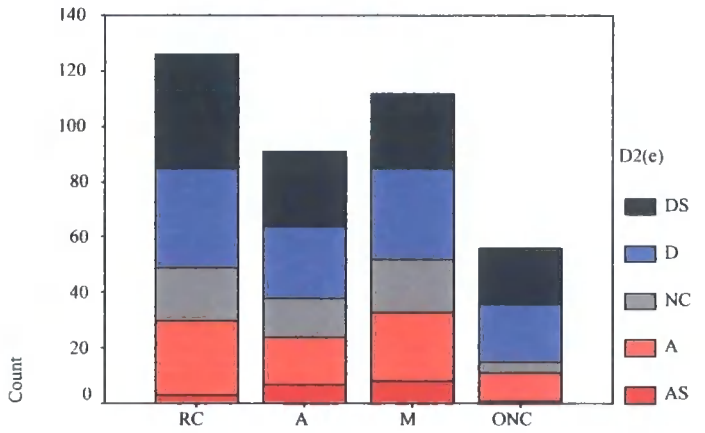

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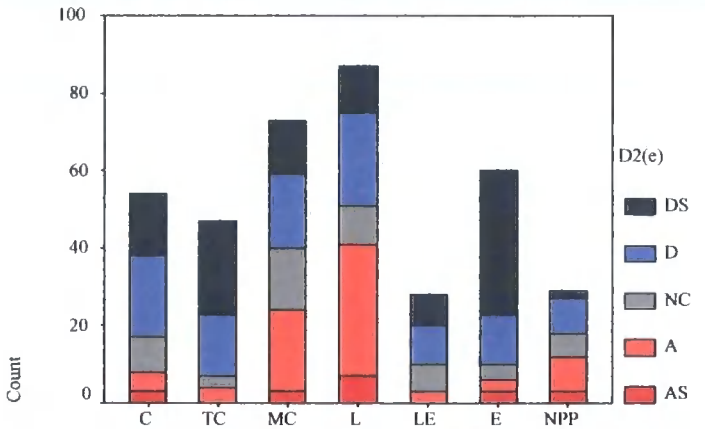

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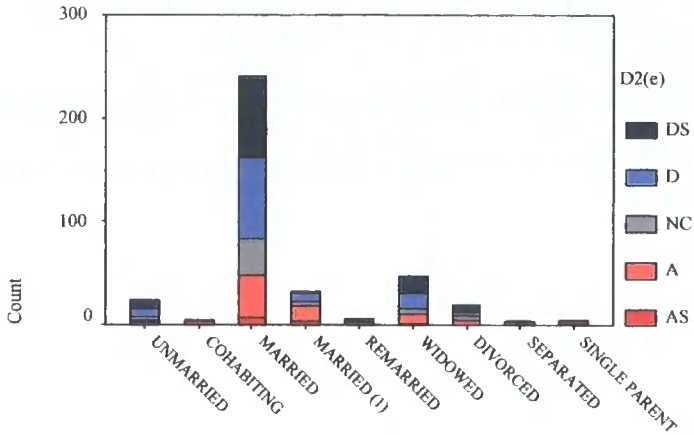

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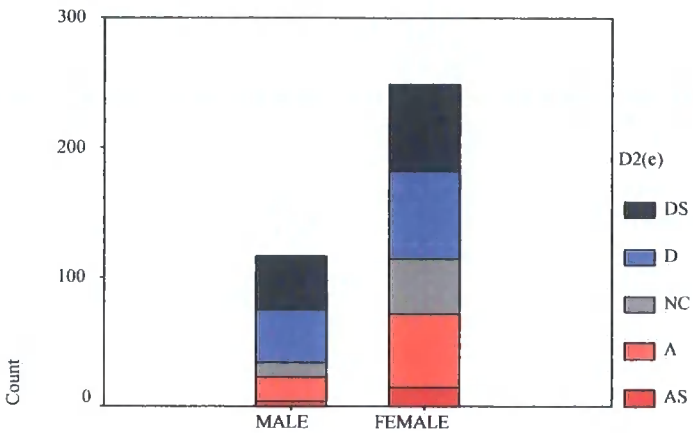

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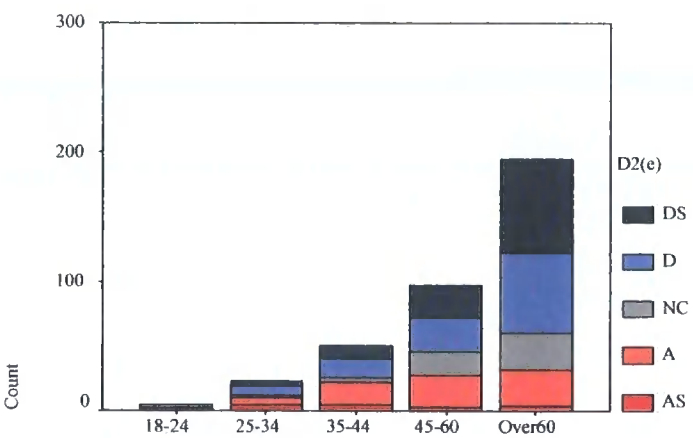
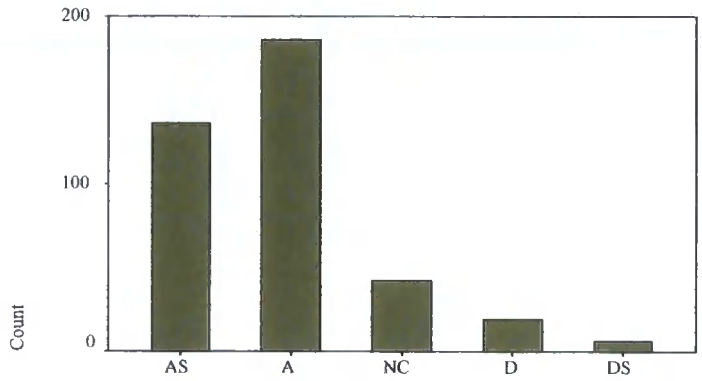


Sample Size: 370.

D3 (a) Each church should provide its own structured marriage preparation course.



D3(a) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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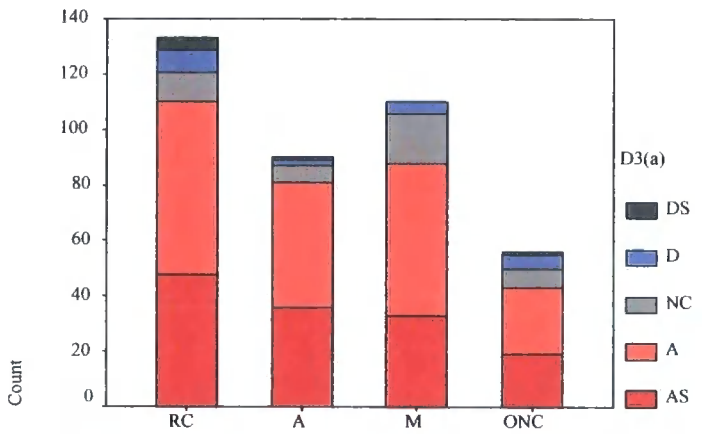

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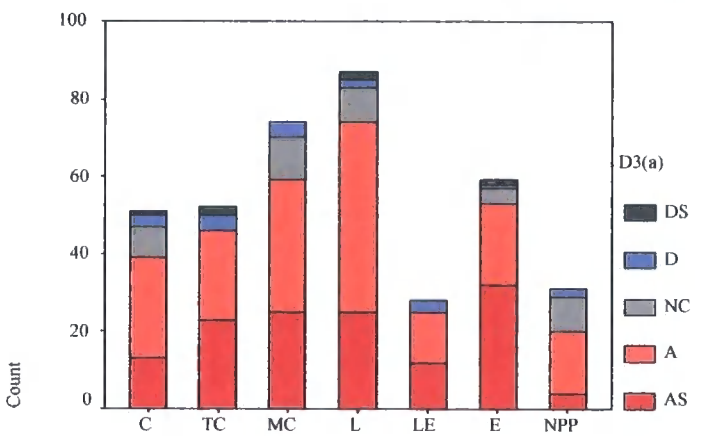

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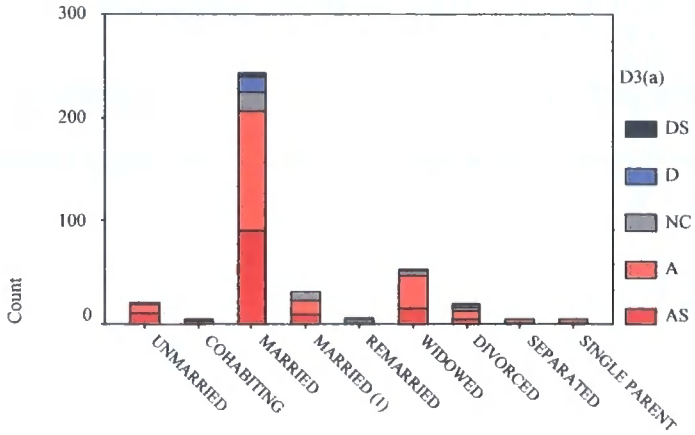

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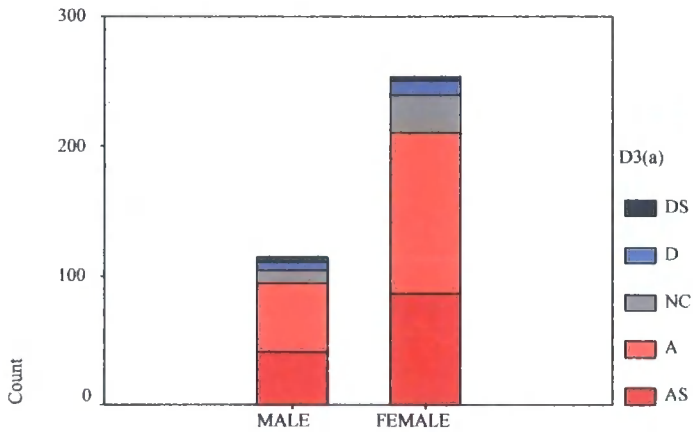

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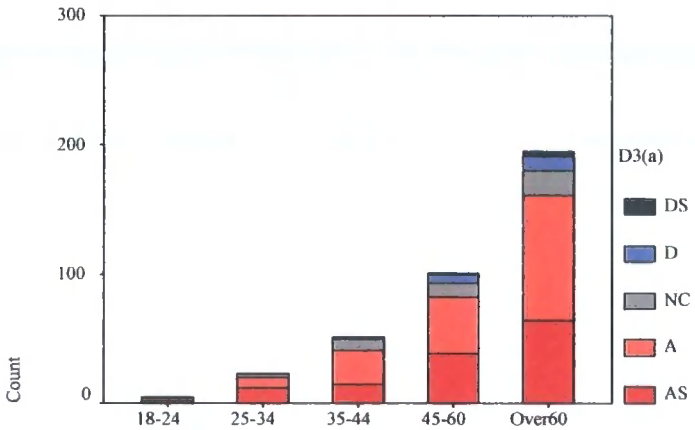
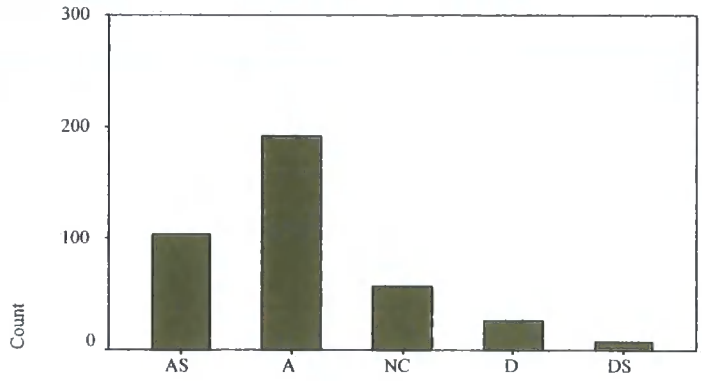


Sample Size: 375.

D3 (b) Groups of churches should cooperate to provide marriage preparation and education courses.



D3(b) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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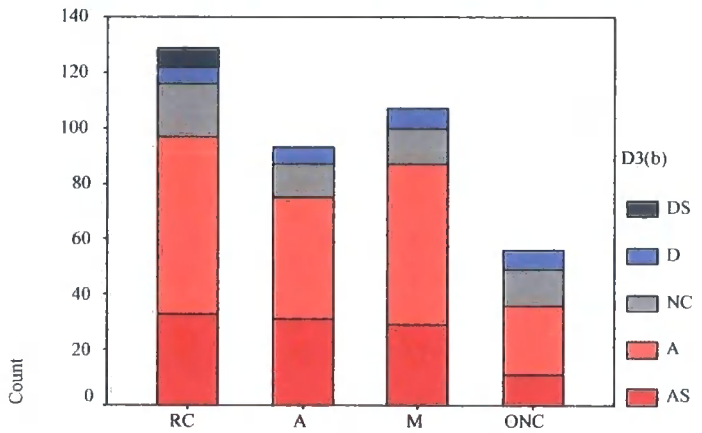

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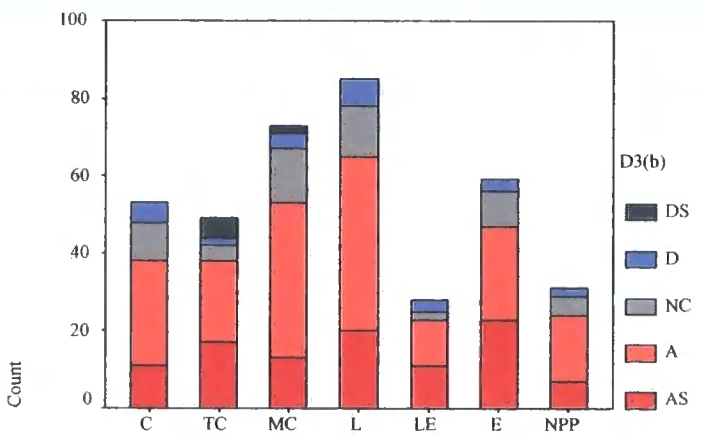

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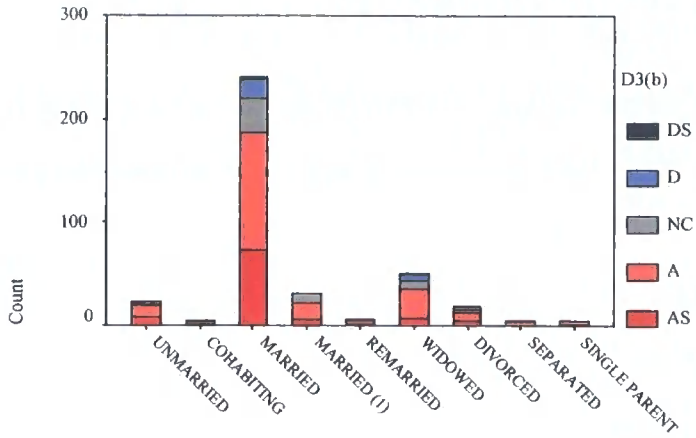

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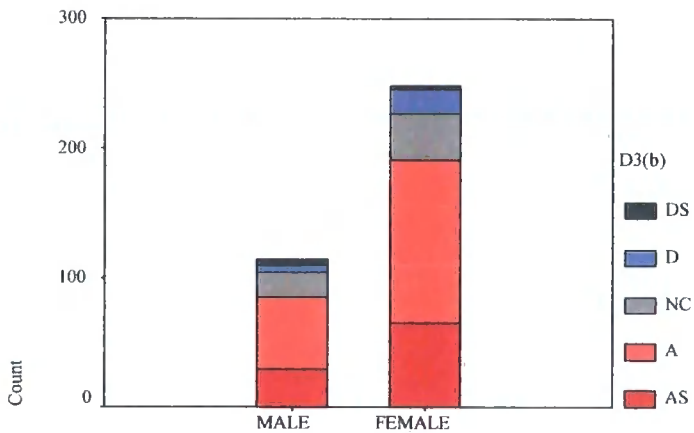

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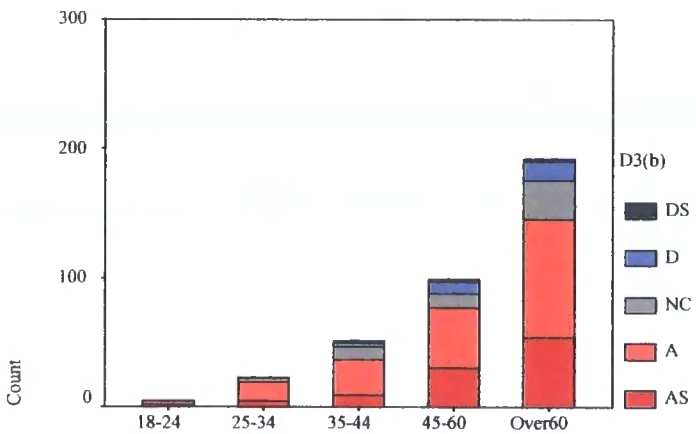

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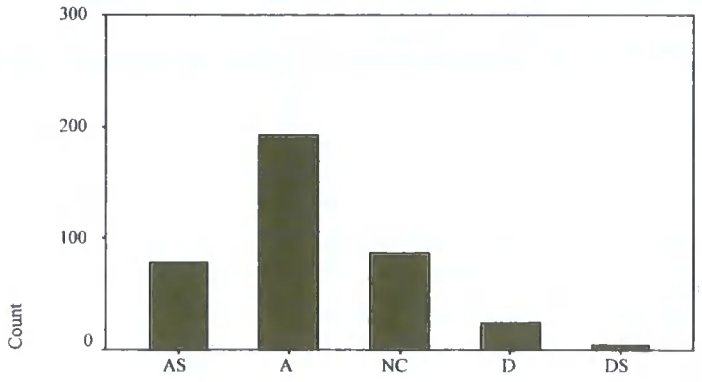
D3 (c) Churches should introduce services of rededication of marriage vows?



D3(c) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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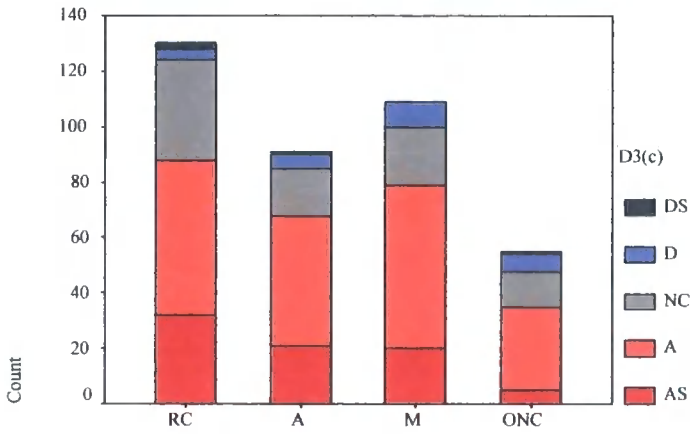

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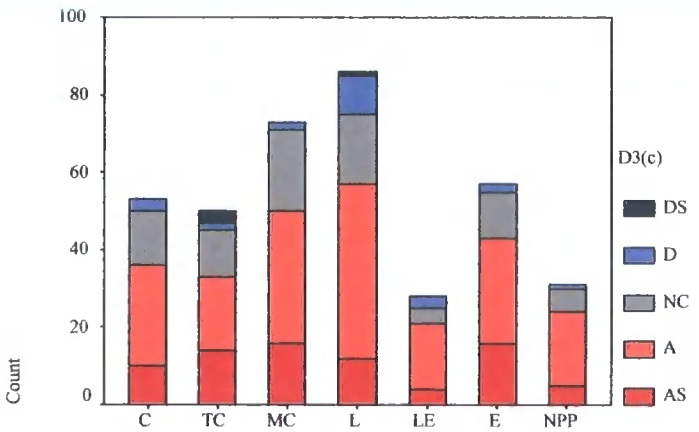

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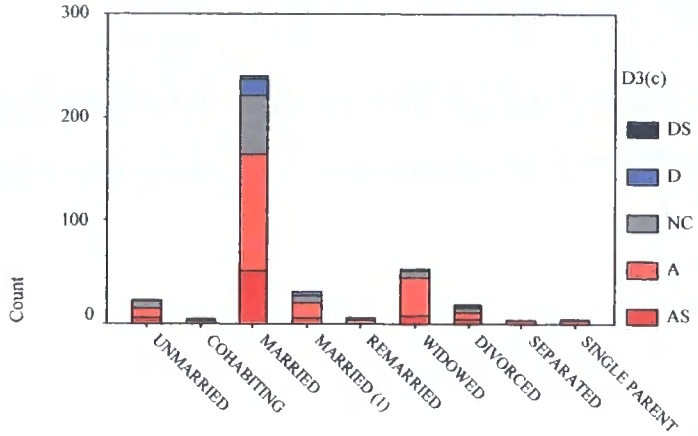

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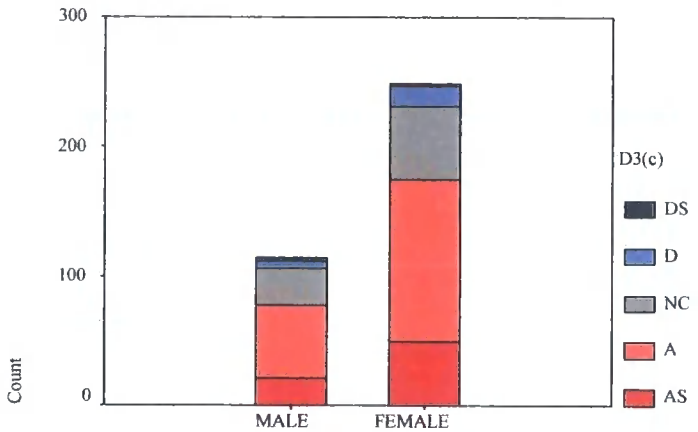

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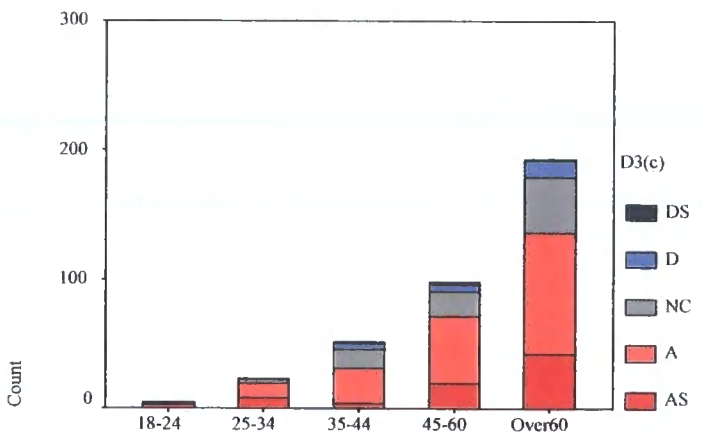
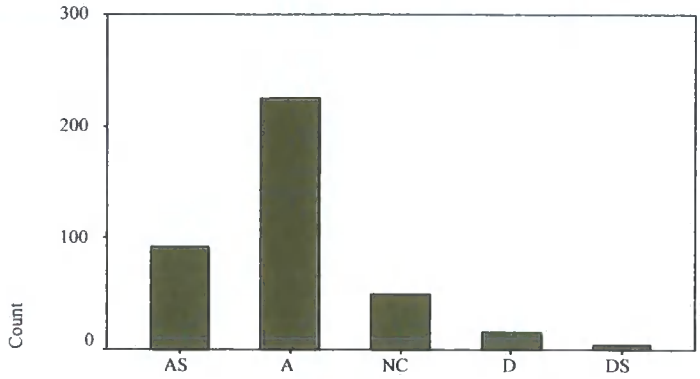


Sample Size: 370.

D3 (d) Churches should attempt to reach out to non-church –going couples preparing for marriage through an expansion of marriage preparation courses?



D3(d) - TOTAL RESPONSE

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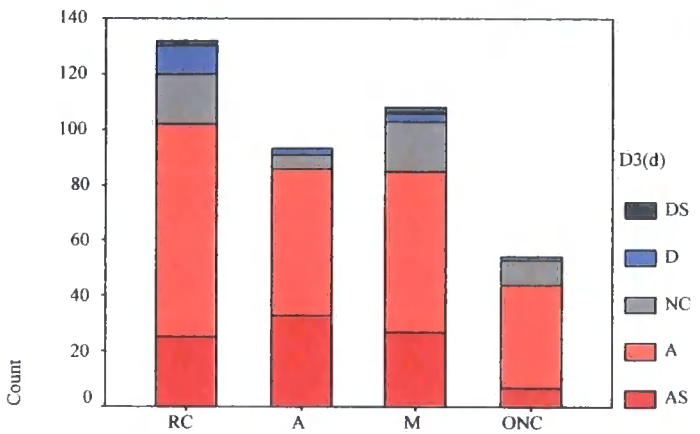

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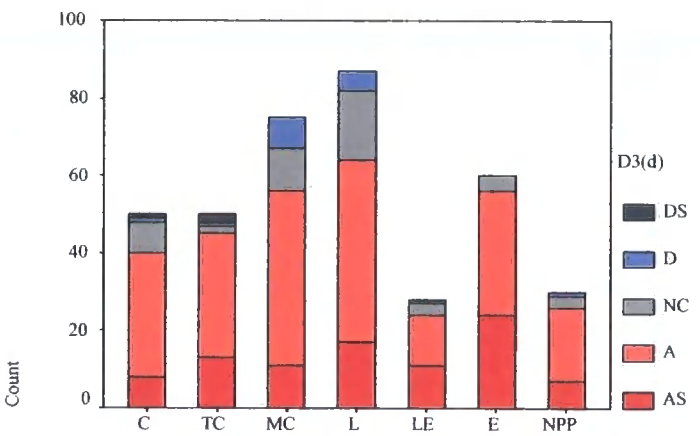

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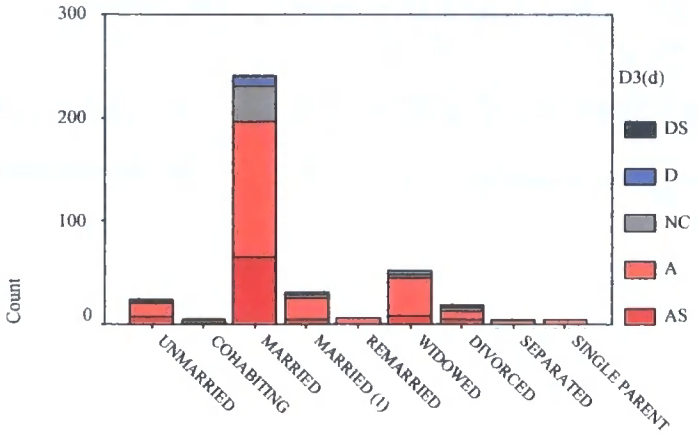

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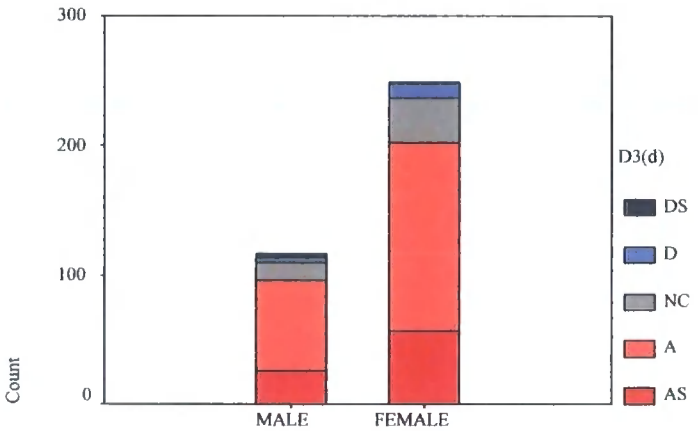
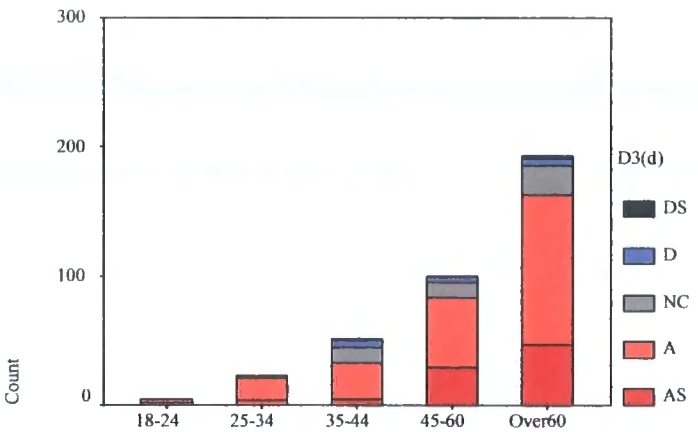
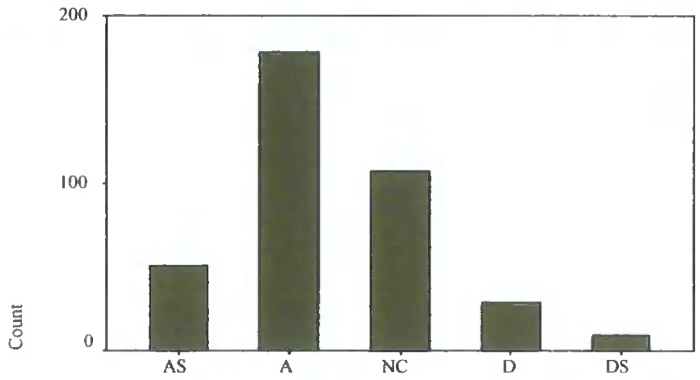


Sample Size: 387.



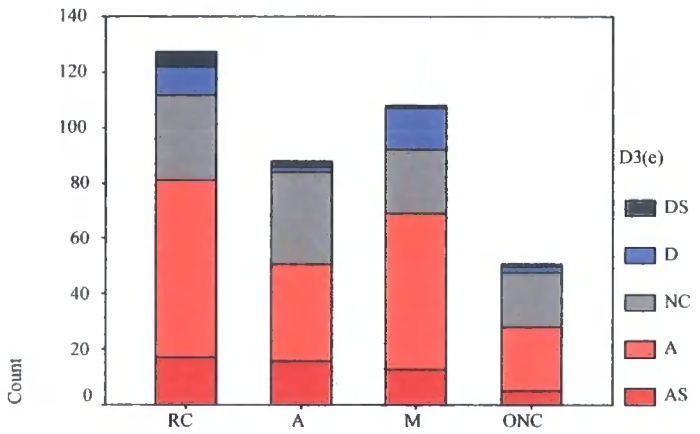
Sample Size: 387.

D3 (e) Marriage preparation courses involving Relate or other outside agencies should be explored.

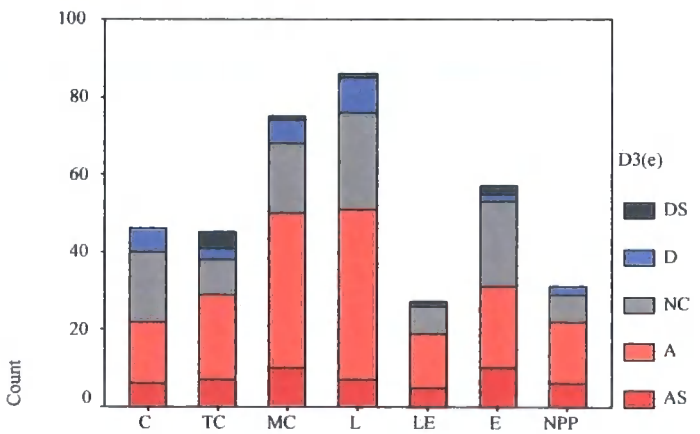


D3(e) - TOTAL RESPONSE

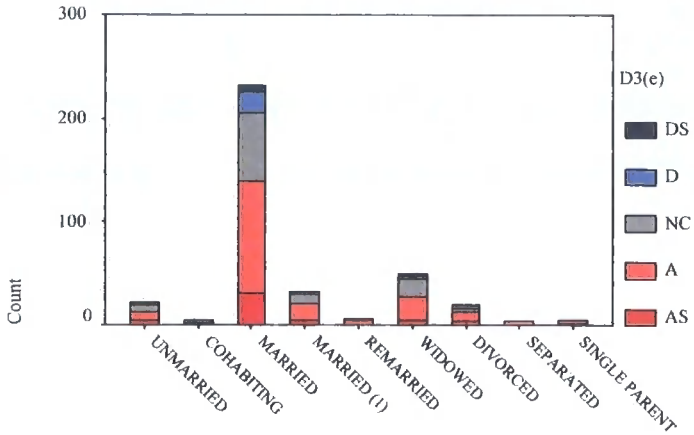
Sample Size: 374.



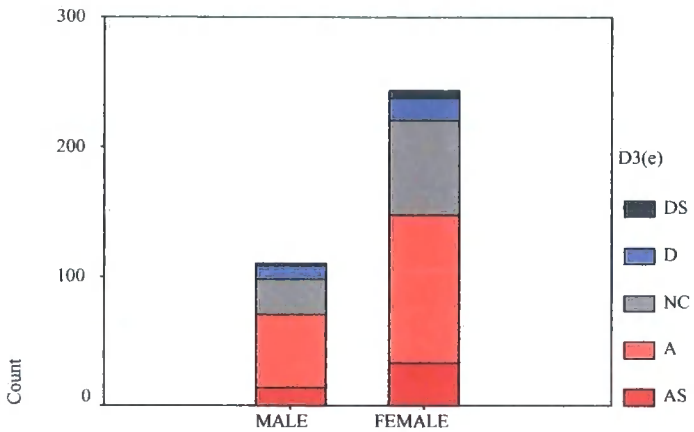
Sample Size: 374.



Sample Size: 367.



Sample Size: 371.



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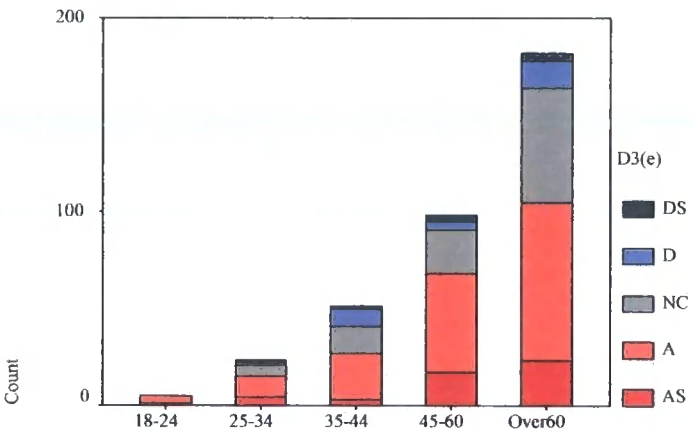
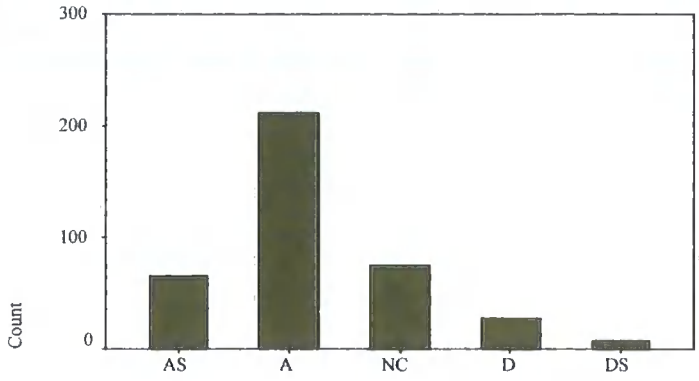


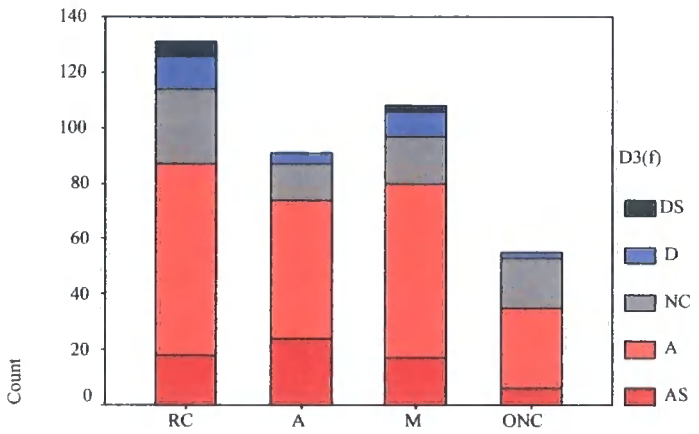
Sample Size: 359.

D3 (f) Churches should be more active in promoting National Marriage Week?

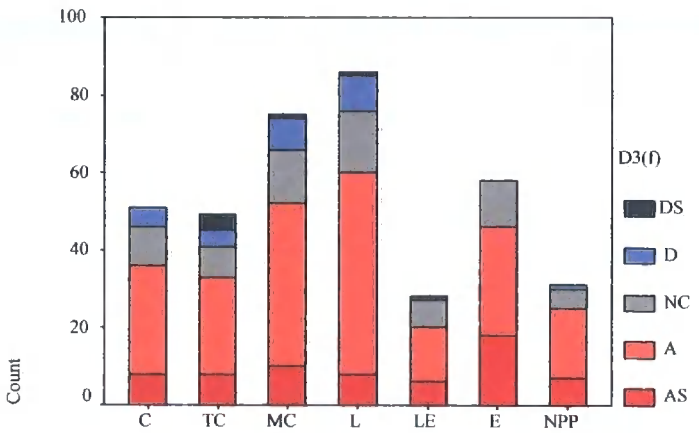


D3(f) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 385.



Sample Size: 385.



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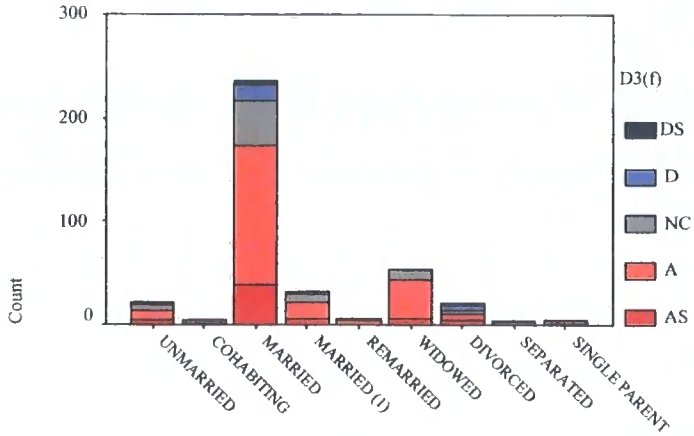

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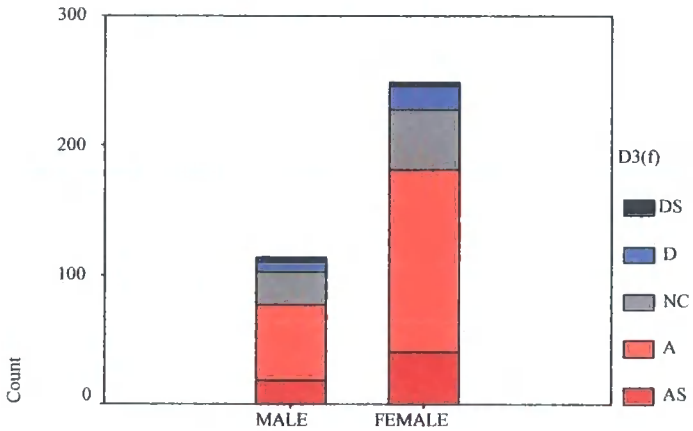

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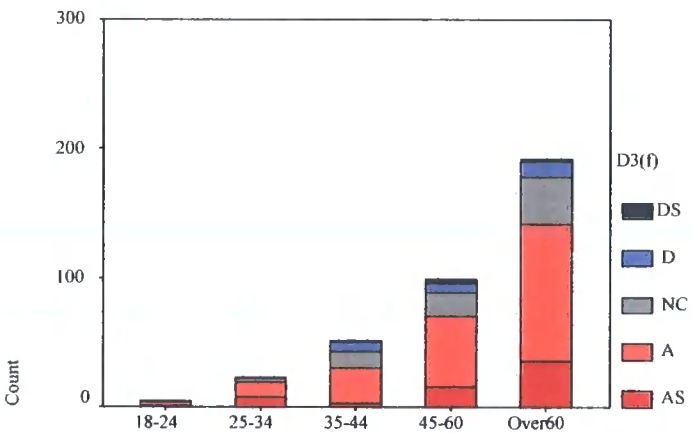
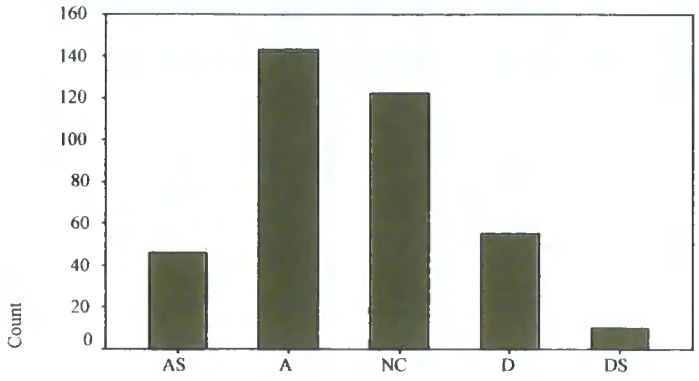


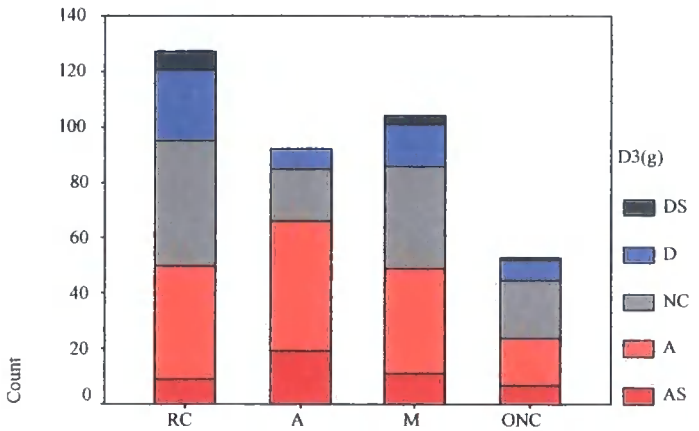
Sample Size: 370.

D3 (g) Churches should participate in marriage 'fairs' to promote the Christian ideals of marriage?



D3(g) - TOTAL RESPONSE

Sample Size: 376.



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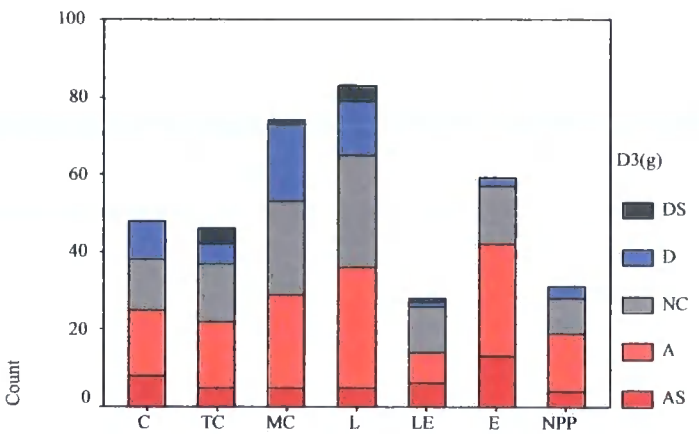

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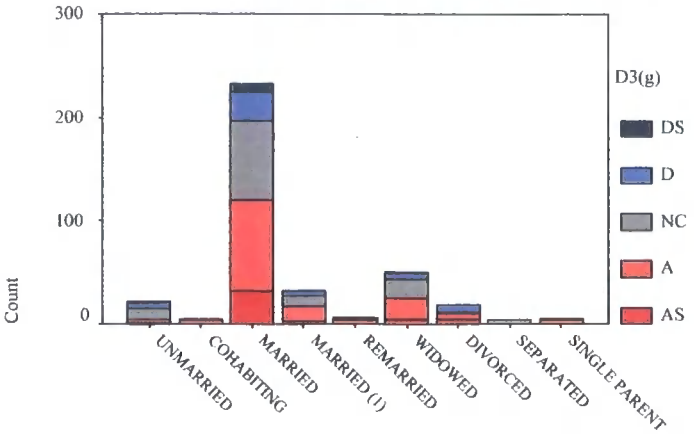

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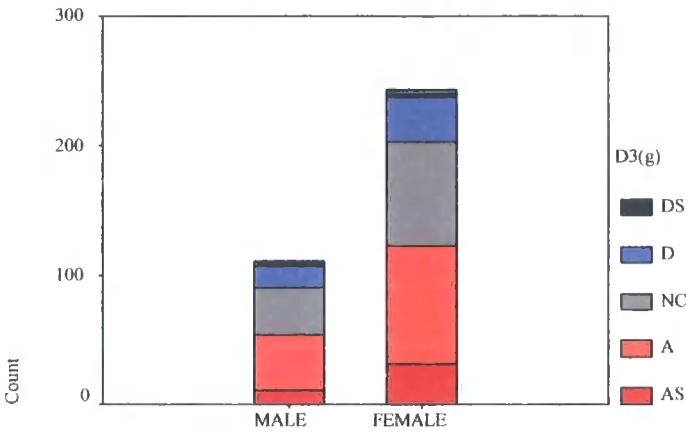
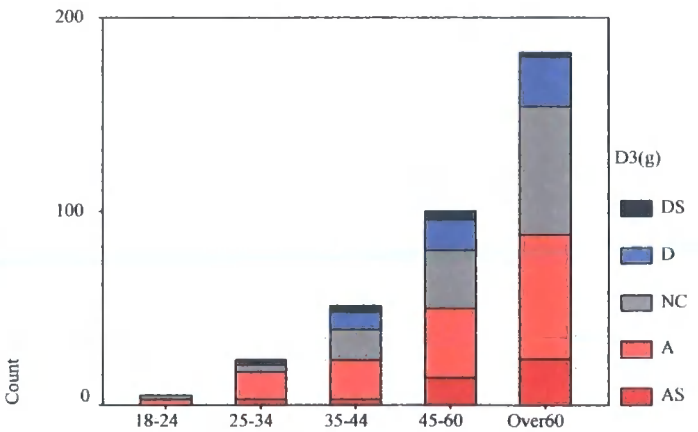


Sample Size: 354.



Sample Size: 361.

D4. Have you any further comments on any aspect of this questionnaire?

Respondents were given an opportunity to make further comments of their own, recognising that questionnaires are never able to ask the questions that are necessarily relevant to an individual's particular circumstances. These are incorporated into Chapter 5 and ensuing discussions.