

TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE WITHIN A  
PASTORAL FAMILY IN THE VOLKSKERK VAN AFRICA  
(PEOPLE'S CHURCH OF AFRICA)

BY

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis hereby submitted to the University of Pretoria for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor in Trauma Counseling has not previously been submitted by me or by any one for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my own work in design and execution and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

**SIGNED** .....

**DATE** .....

**SUPERVISOR** .....

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## SUMMARY

This dissertation is about the traumatic experience of divorce within a pastoral family in the Volkskerk van Afrika (People's Church of Africa). The intention of the author was to find ways of understanding why this phenomenon happens in a pastoral family. This research was carried out because the author had observed the painful struggle and trauma of a colleague and friend due to the onslaught of the divorce phenomenon. The emphasis of this research was on the roll of the denomination of the Volkskerk van Afrika (People's church of Africa) when divorce strikes the parsonage and how the church as a custodian of pastoral care can help those individuals, especially pastoral families therapeutically.

In Chapter Two the author has helped the reader understand the science of methodology and how this discipline functions in pastoral care. The methods of Gerkin, Taylor, and Collins were used to emphasize the high calling of the shepherding model. In Chapter Three the author has helped the reader understand how Christians understand marriage in the Christian tradition. Here the author touched on:

- Marriage as an expression of the relational nature of God;
- Marriage as a journey towards intimacy;
- Key expressions that shape our view of a successful marriage;
- Marriage as a covenant relationship

In Chapter Four the author outlined the process of divorce and how it impacts negatively on the pastoral family. This Chapter has also looked at the theory of trauma and how it traumatizes pastoral families in the aftermath of the divorce phenomenon. Here the author discussed:

- Divorce as a comprehensive loss;
- Stages in the divorce process;
- The psychological effect of divorce on children;
- The stance of the Bible on divorce

Pertaining to trauma the author cites Means who says that “trauma is something sudden, violent, brutal or catastrophic which touches a person’s life in some intimate way. It comes from the Greek word “wound”, which can be on physical, emotional psychological, relational and spiritual level. These levels are

interconnected; therefore trauma affects one's entire life" (2000: 3). Chapter Five contains a sad anecdote of how divorce has traumatized the author's colleague. This anecdote has exposed the author to the pain and of the pastor and his family, not to mention the congregation, and the community when faced with such a traumatic experience such as the divorce phenomenon.

The closing Chapter of this dissertation suggests ways in which the denomination of the VVA (PCA) can create a pastoral care manual for the church which will specifically deal with marriage, divorce, remarriage, and other issues when it occurs. The church being the body of Christ should be a caring community which should bring healing and spiritual wholeness to individuals affected by the onslaught of the divorce phenomenon.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Author:-** here refers to the person who compiled this dissertation;
- **Care giver:** - here refers to a person who is providing care and management of other people's lives on the daily basis;
- **Divorce:** - here refers to the ending of a marriage by a court decree or any complete separation;
- **Family:** - here refers to a kinship grouping which provides for the rearing of children and for certain other human needs;
- **Marriage:** - here refers to a formal agreement between a man and a woman to live together according to the custom of their religion or society. In this dissertation the Christian religion;
- **Methodology:-** here refers to the study of the methods used in a particular subject (this dissertation);
- **Monogamy:** - Here refers to a marriage form permitting only one mate at a time;

- **Orthodox Jew:** - here refers to a Jew who is very strict in the beliefs of a literal Messiah who is yet to come – a literal restoration of the Promised Land and a literal life after death;
- **Pastoral Family:**-here refers to the minister and his/her family;
- **Phenomenon:** - here refers to the traumatic experience of divorce in a pastoral family;
- **Polygamy:** - here refers to a plurality of mates;
- **Reform Jew:-** here refers to a Jew who's revering sacred writings and the work of rabbis through the ages, and tends to see scripture as writings that are about the ongoing consecration of the house of Israel to God;
- **Sociology:** - Here refers to the scientific study of humanity's social life;
- **Society:** - here refers to a relatively independent, self –perpetuating human group which occupies a particular territory, shares a culture, and has most activities within this group;
- **Therapist:** - here refers to someone who counsels people affected by the traumatic experience of divorce and marital distress;

- **Trauma:** - here refers to anything that is sudden, unexpected and cause discomfort, pain and even death to a person;
- **Volkskerk van Afrika (People's Church of Africa):** - here refers to the prayer setting of the author which were established in May 14, 1922, Cape Town, South Africa (Reformed Church in South Africa).

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a research on the problematic aspect of divorce and how it traumatizes individuals, especially church pastoral families. The author laid exceptional emphasis on the policy, specifically divorce of pastoral families in the Volkskerk van Afrika (People's Church of Africa) (hereafter: VVA (PCA) and how it is enforced in the praxis of daily life.

Further, this dissertation contains the following:

- An introductory chapter
- Research methodology
- Marriage in the Christian tradition
- Divorce: The process
- Trauma
- An anecdote of clergy divorce in the author's denomination and its impact on the pastor and family. The closing chapter of this dissertation attempts to help the denomination of the VVA (PCA) to create a pastoral care manual for the church which will specifically deal with marriage, divorce, remarriage, and

other issues whenever it occurs. Here the author specifically looked at other denominations such as the Uniting Presbyterian Church of South Africa and the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa. Recruitment and training is an important part of this dissertation. Concerning training, Obang make the following observation when he says that “we need persons for specialize ministries, qualified chaplains in the general and mental hospitals, in our schools at all levels, in our industries and all walks of life, not just any individual who goes by the title “pastor” (2005: 38). This dissertation has also looked at how the minister and his/her family can journey forward despite the pressures of the ordained ministry. The author has also looked at the aspect of how individuals can keep love alive. The following issues were touched on:

- How to maintain the love relationship
- Keys to intentional marital growth
- Biblical advice on maintaining love relationships
- Keeping love alive

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

When the author looks back on the long road of researching on this dissertation, his ever present God is the first to give thanks to. However, my journey thus far was not a very smooth one. My perseverance was tested to the limit because for the better part of my academic journey I was without any congregation and without any financial income. However, I declare here, it is God who made all things possible and I thank Him for His Grace impart on me. I want to echo the words of the Apostle Paul as recorded in 2 Corinthians where he says **“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God” (3: 5)**. It is God who brought me this far.

Let me express my greatest appreciation and gratitude to the following people:

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- To my wife and three sons, “I love you all. Thank you for allowing me to study. My God bless you in your own studies.”
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