

PAVELSKY'S CRISIS INTERVENTION MODEL AS A COUNSELING FRAMEWORK IN ADDRESSING TECHNICAL DIVORCE IN CONTEMPORARY MARRIAGES

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary marriage is faced with the challenge of divorce in general and technical divorce in particular. This makes it difficult for marriages to be secure because many couples find it hard to handle the challenges facing their marriages. Technical divorce is a social cankerworm because it occurs in a subtle and unconventional manner that makes intervention difficult. This type of divorce manifests in form of physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, social and spiritual detachments. There are various factors responsible for it with their attendant dangers. It means that counselors have the imperative of intervening in a way that life could be bearable for the couples concerned. It is strongly recommended that Pavelsky's (2005) crisis intervention model of counseling be applied by counselors to identify the nature and causes of technical divorce in order to address the problem either preventively or curatively.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges confronting humankind in general and the family in particular is the issue of insecurity due to divorce. The menace is so pervasive to the point that it cuts across all religious, educational and economic strata of life. This is against the original plan of God that the institution of marriage "once formed remains indissoluble except through death of either the wife or husband."¹ The more dangerous aspect of this social cankerworm called divorce is that it is not always so glaring in practice that outsiders may see it in time. It comes in a subtle and unconventional manner. This is why it is described as "Technical Divorce" and a serious challenge for counsellors, whom many people turn to for direction and help in difficult life situations.² In other words, technical divorce in marriage refers to the unconventional practice of divorce in which spouses still live together in the same house but spousal rights are persistently denied over a long period of time thereby making life unbearable for those concerned. It is technical in nature because while the spouses concerned find their marriage unpalatable, those who may intervene may not discover the problem in time because it is neither open separation nor conventional divorce experience – it is hidden marital crisis. It is imperative for Christian counselors to develop intervention models that will help to identify the problem, its causes and proffer necessary remedies.

The issue of technical divorce in marriages is a reality which must be tackled headlong. The reason is that those involved in the ugly experience are traumatized and intervention eludes them because it is a secret pain. They keep asking the rhetorical question: "How do I tell people that my spouse and I are not collaborating?" To address this challenge, Pavelsky's Crisis Intervention Theory (CIT) is considered a relevant model of counseling for proper handling of the challenge. Therefore, this paper briefly presents Pavelsky's theory and examines the nature, causes, dangers and prevention/remedy of

technical divorce in the contemporary marriages alongside Pavelsky's counseling framework.

PAVELSKY'S CRISIS INTERVENTION MODEL EXPLAINED

It is essential to note, as Due observed that,

The theories that underpin most counseling practice have had a profound effect on the shape of our contemporary culture. The prevalence of counseling is just one of the spin-offs of the theoretical models of human beings adopted by those whose names have become common currency in our language.... When we speak of counseling therefore, we speak of an activity that has roots.³

One of such theories was propounded by Pavelsky on crisis intervention and is hereby described. According to Pavelsky, homeostasis is the basic stance towards life which determines high or low levels of functioning and satisfaction or dissatisfaction in lifestyle. This theorist emphasized the need to identify both the character and the source of a crisis. He identifies four dimensions in one of which emotional distress or disorientation may have its source. The first one is the intrapersonal dimension wherein crisis arises when a person is unable to cope with his/her impulses in relation to cognition, emotion or behaviour. The second is the interpersonal dimension, which arises when a person is not able to enter into constructive problem solving relationship with other persons. It may also be as a result of communication problems within a relationship.

Physical dimension is where the person's health is the source of the crisis. Crisis develops when an individual cannot keep his/her

chronic or life-threatening health problem under control. The other one is the spiritual dimension, which has to do with the individual's response to God or the religious community. In this case, crisis ensues when a person is unable to yield to the salvation message. Pavelsky opines that elements of all these dimensions may manifest but one of the dimensions will predominate as the source of a person's imbalance.⁴

Pavelsky further states three situations from which the immediate or precipitating cause of crisis may ensue. These include real or imagined loss of support from a trusted person or thing. Generally, such a trusted person used to be a family member or a pet with whom or which one has established intimate emotional ties. Loss of control over a perceived threatening situation is the second cause. Here the person in crisis feels powerless and helpless while facing or perceiving overwhelming sets of impossible demands for threat. The third is a new or unique situation that requires adaptive behaviours which the person has not developed. Examples of new situations include change in occupation or a previously experienced situation taking place in a new context.⁵

Short-term stabilization starts as the kind and cause of the crisis are identified. Stabilization continues as the counselor helps the person affected to understand his/her present situation and sense of control over the situation is developed. The model of understanding coupled with support helps to gain control over the life situation. It is also used as the starting point for generating a long-term plan for stabilization that can remedy what has been discovered as the source or cause of the homeostatic imbalance. Pavelsky postulated that long-term stabilization will be achieved as the crisis counselor gives support for the counselee to secure needed intervention in relation to either legal, psychological, medical or counseling matters.⁶

Pavelsky's theory is a relevant model for intervening in the crisis

of technical divorce. The Crisis Intervention Theory (CIT) is an appropriate model due to its emphasis on the need to understand the situation as it is, its root cause, and the need to work towards immediate and future stabilization of the people concerned. This is congruent with the counseling goal of preventing or intervening in the crisis of technical divorce in contemporary marriages.

NATURE OF TECHNICAL DIVORCE IN MARRIAGE

Technical divorce in contemporary marriages comes in diverse ways. A few of these are cited here.

1. Physical Detachment: Expressing it in musical terms, LaHaye compared physical touch in marriage to "the instrumental adjustment necessary... to provide a beautiful, harmonious symphony."⁷ Some couples have been detached physically from each other in a technical way. This is the situation where physical body touch does not give the desired emotional feeling. In some cases, when a spouse's leg or any other part of the body touches the other person, apology is required by the partner touched with all seriousness. Holding each other's hand, hugging, pecking or kissing have become taboos to such couples. Another aspect of physical detachment is to be sleeping either in separate rooms or beds or when being in the same room or bed makes the spouses uncomfortable.

2. Emotional Detachment: This refers to the situation whereby the spouses no longer have interest in each other. This may be seen when one or both of the couples turn their searchlight for companionship on their children to express feelings meant for each other.⁸ Such couples do not see each other as true partners again due to frequent quarrels. This is evident in the fact that sharing of joy and hurt together is no longer practiced. Concern for each other is also not expressed again.

3. Verbal Detachment: The situation here is that the spouses concerned might have been good in verbal expressions before they got married and even in the early part of their marriages. Later the ability to communicate with each other usually vanishes after becoming married.⁹ Couples experiencing technical divorce no longer find it interesting to communicate with each other. It is shown in lack of willingness to explain issues to one's spouse for him/her to understand. Another angle to it is lack of willingness to listen to one's spouse to the level of understanding what the person is saying. Language of communication between such spouses is coded and choppy.

4. Sexual Detachment: Tim LaHaye rightly opined that "... the sexual act of married lovemaking...is the most thrilling experience a man and a woman can go through on this earth."¹⁰ It is regrettable however, that some couples only move together and wear the same type of dresses to cover up their technical divorce. Such couples grumble over sexual relationship to the point that interest in it is lost. They may be carrying out other responsibilities like cooking, picking each other in the family vehicle(s), among others. The issue of sex has been perceived by such couples as an abomination.

5. Financial Detachment: Here, couples no longer handle financial matters together. If one of them suffers financially, he/she bears it alone. Whatever amount of money one has is not considered as belonging to both of them. The amount of money each is getting is not properly known to the other. Each of the spouses uses the money in his/her possession at will and the other has no authority to raise any question. Projects can be embarked upon by one without the knowledge of the other, since money is owned individually. The way such couples use their money is the outward reflection of their true inner values.¹¹

6. Social Detachment: Technical divorce among contemporary

couples can also be in the form of socializing separately. Such couples find it difficult to move together on regular basis. They find it more convenient staying with friends for hours in order to avoid being together as spouses. Some relate with others of the opposite gender and confide in them to fill the "missing gap" in relationship. Regrettably, some of the friends being kept are not known to their spouses. Some even find it preferable travelling for engagements with other persons than their own spouses.

7. Spiritual Detachment: The spouses here do not handle spiritual matters together as expected. They may neither handle their devotional activities nor pray on issues affecting each other together. Fasting is embarked upon without notifying each other to the point that it is after food is prepared that the other person will know that fasting is going on.

POSSIBLE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR TECHNICAL DIVORCE

It is noteworthy that factors responsible for the menace under discussion are numerous. A few of the factors are discussed below:

1. Betrayal of Trust: Here, one of the spouses has done something grievous which has injured the confidence reposed on him/her by his/her spouse. It may involve extra-marital sexual affairs or mismanagement of money, among others.¹²

2. Personal Pain from an Abusive Past: In the opinion of Collins, it is possible for a person to have had a painful abusive experience which may make it difficult to love at present. Such a person might have been used sexually or otherwise and dumped by a trusted person. Any similar action or expression by the present spouse may make the victim withdraw from playing his/her role appropriately.¹³

3. Public Disgrace of Spouse: Technical divorce may be a result of treating one's spouse contemptuously in the public. This may be in the form of shouting the person down while speaking in a gathering. It may be in form of using abusive words in the presence of friends or children. It may as well occur in form of discussing his/her weaknesses or failures openly.

4. Ugly Addiction: Collins defines addiction as "any thinking or behavior that is habitual, repetitious and very difficult or impossible to control regardless of the consequences."¹⁴ People are enticed into addictive practices because of the short-term pleasures without considering its long-term consequences. There are addictions that can make one's spouse withdraw from practicing joyful marital relationship. Such addictions may include spending unlimited time discussing with some particular opposite gender in questionable circumstances on regular basis. In the opinion of Collins, such addictions can "drive us into secret lives."¹⁵ The addiction may even include spending excessive time watching football matches or other sporting activities, films or listening to music. The practice may harden the other spouse to develop a life of solitude life since the spouse has no time for him/her.

5. Uncaring Attitude in Critical Situations: There are cases where one of the spouses might have needed the attention of the other genuinely and it was not given repeatedly and intentionally. This is the situation where, instead of caring for each other, spouses are only interested in each other for personal advantage.¹⁶ Such situations may be in the time of sickness, failure in business, crisis at the place of work and the likes. The uncaring attitude may also reflect in wanting sex by force even when the spouse is either sick or not emotionally comfortable. The attitude may create hatred in the mind of the spouse who see him/herself as being exploited.

6. Communication Breakdown: Collins also opines that

breakdown in communication in the past may make spouses find it difficult to try again. The experience thereby propels one or both of them to withdraw from expressing feelings and this definitely makes their relationship dull.¹⁷

7. Lack of Sexual Fulfilment: One of the major conjugal rights expected from each other by those bound in marriage is sexual satisfaction. Regrettably, some contemporary spouses groan because they do not experience sexual fulfillment. There are cases where the wife complains of tiredness due to too much work or as a means to punish her husband for whatever offence he had committed. Another case may be due to "over spirituality" by the husband who is either always busy studying the Bible/Quran or other religious literature, meditating, fasting or praying for hours or days. This hinders him/her from playing love with his wife in the name of not wanting to defile himself because of his spiritual assignments.

DANGERS OF TECHNICAL DIVORCE

It should be noted that the dangers associated with technical divorce in contemporary marriages are inexhaustible within the context of this paper. Some of the dangers are hereby highlighted.

1. It Creates Emotional Crisis: God instituted marriage to help stabilize couples emotionally. Whenever technical divorce is in place, both the spouses will feel it. Due to the nature of the mind, the memory of the ways the divorce is manifesting in the relationship will be flashing back from time to time. Anxiety, fear, guilt, sadness, anger, bitterness, frustration, depression and suicidal thoughts may set in.¹⁸ It thereby affects the performance of responsibilities which may on the long run affect upliftment at the place of work or loss of job due to poor performance.

2. It Hinders Trust: The popular proverb "once beaten, twice

shy" best describes this danger. The fact that commitment to the marriage has been affected negatively makes it difficult to trust one's spouse again. Unfortunately, lack of trust makes spouses to be playing "hide and seek" in their relationship. It becomes difficult to defend one's spouse if he/she is accused of a wrong doing by an outsider.

3. It Allows Room for Abrupt Ventilation of Negative Emotions: Experience has shown that there are cases where the reaction of a person would appear more outrageous than the immediate offence committed by the other person. On many occasions, onlookers might condemn the one reacting without knowing that the reaction is not just to the immediate offence. Neglect of each other by spouses may give room for violent reactions by the offended which can create serious embarrassment to both spouses.

4. It Hinders Free and Genuine Role Play: The experience of technical divorce may create fear in the mind of the spouses about sustainability of the marriage. This may hinder them from playing their roles in the marriage properly. For instance, it is expected in the African context that the wife should prepare food regularly for her husband, while the husband gives money for the upkeep of the family. These roles will become difficult to carry out since their hearts are no longer united. Thus the family is thrown into trauma.

5. It Changes Life beyond Imagination: Commonly, couples giving room for technical divorce in their marriages never comprehend the enormity of the practice. They might assume that the denial of rights will only teach their spouses a lesson that will correct some attitudes in them. Little do they note that the life of the person practicing the menace is being affected negatively, too. Another danger is that it may result into real divorce and each of the spouses will be out of the marriage completely.

6. It Affects Spirituality Negatively: It is not gainsaying that the contemporary couples will be affected negatively in their spiritual life if they are practicing technical divorce. For example, their individual and collective prayer and study of religious sacred books will be affected adversely. They may also experience setback in attendance of soul-lifting programmes because lack of interest by one may eventually affect the other. The above dangers being prevalent with the attendant insecurity on contemporary marriages makes it imperative for counselors to embark on measures that will either prevent or remedy the problem of technical divorce.

PREVENTIVE/CURATIVE MEASURES TO TECHNICAL DIVORCE IN CONTEMPORARY MARRIAGES

There are four key points suggested for counselors to apply in helping couples to remedy the problem under discussion. The points are the need for counselors to help couples to (1) recognize individual uniqueness, (2) accept each other, (3) appreciate and affirm each other and (4) for counselors to organize marriage enrichment programmes. These points are discussed one after the other.

1. Counselors Assisting Couples in Recognizing Individual Uniqueness as a Solution to Technical Divorce

Just as stated in Pavelsky's theory that identifying the source of a crisis is a part of intervention, Omojola notes that variation in cultural background can later lead to crisis. According to Omojola, "when a husband and wife come from different cultures, the cultural differences will show between them. To some extent humans are products of their cultures, either mother-culture or adopted-culture, and they exercise influence on our thinking patterns and behaviours. At times, they put a lot of pressure on us."¹⁹ This should be noted and handled maturely if intimacy will be experienced between contemporary spouses.

Let it be stated here that intimacy is not a clinging dependence, neither is it a controlling dominion. Intimacy is a cherished linking of two separate persons (cf. Genesis 1:27). Separateness is an element of intimacy. A healthy degree of separateness strengthens intimacy as individual gifts, interests and activities enrich lives together. As couples know more about who they are, as separate persons, their togetherness is more highly valued. Each of them is uniquely created and the uniqueness is God-given. For instance, the uniqueness may reflect in speech and physical strength, among others. God has invested a part of Himself in humans as separate beings and to deny or suppress it will cause commotion in the marriage. This calls for proper self-esteem if the uniqueness would be a healthy one. Each of the spouses needs to be counseled to have a healthy self-esteem because it is the most important prerequisite for intimacy in marriage.²⁰ This self-esteem begins with accepting God's valuing of oneself. It matures with acceptance of one's own uniqueness. It deepens when one acts on his/her belief in oneself as possessing God's image. Perception of self-esteem should be balanced because it enriches others as one lives it out daily.

2. Counsellors Guiding Couples to See 'Spousal Acceptance' as a Means to Stabilization

Following Pavelsky CIT, one of the short term stabilization strategies is spousal acceptance. Since human beings are created differently, couples' uniqueness may as well make the journey rough if care is not taken. That is why there is need for acceptance of each other with the uniqueness. The same characteristics that attracted one to the other are capable of being the source of painful conflict. This should not be so; they are rather to be guided by counselors to celebrate their differences which will begin to show more clearly as the journey continues. That is why the Bible states in Romans 15:7, "Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you." It should be noted that one is naturally drawn to a person with strengths where

one has weaknesses. These strengths are seen as assets which one unconsciously wanted to acquire. The strength in one's spouse should not be allowed to lead to detachment in any form.

Again, it should be realized that a marriage would be lopsided if the two partners are alike. God wants couples to expand themselves; to allow each other's individuality which makes them more loving and more giving. God knows them and gives each to the other to achieve the balance they need in their relationship. Although acceptance is a difficult discipline, counselors should guide couples to depend only on God who can help them accept each other perfectly well.²¹

3. Counselors Educating Couples on the Place of Appreciating and Affirming as an Antidote for Technical Divorce

Every person needs to be valued by one special other. Appreciation and affirmation are strong twin-strategies for long-term intervention in technical divorce in contemporary marriages. It is one thing to accept, it is another to appreciate. Appreciation emphasizes what is accepted. One of the major things to give within a marriage is sexual relationship. This will be possible when there is proper understanding about sexual intimacy based on the fact that sex is ordained by God for the benefit of the couple (I Cor. 7:1-5). It will also be possible if roles are understood and are played properly.

Reciprocity and reinforcement form an important part of appreciation and affirmation. Couples can be educated through counseling to appreciate even their differences because they make them appear like the rainbow. Affirmation is the process of making firm or reinforcing. To affirm a spouse is to acknowledge a strength already found in that person. Affirmation comes in the form of compliments. A husband may be counseled to affirm or reinforce his wife through quality attention, affection, trustworthiness, sexual

pleasuring and honouring which will prevent detachment from each other (I Pet. 2:7). A wife may also be guided by a counselor to reinforce her husband by delicious meals, clean household and body and sexual relations, among others (cf. I Pet. 3:1-5). If counselors help couples to carry out all these roles, it will result in strong marital intimacy and technical divorce is either prevented or cured.

4. Counsellors Organizing Regular Marriage Enrichment Programmes as a Panacea to Technical Divorce

One of the methods of long-term stabilization as emphasized in Pavcelsky's model that can be helpful in combating technical divorce is marriage enrichment. Marriage enrichment programmes should be put in place. The enrichment programmes for couples should focus on God's plan for marriage. Counsellors should emphasize the fact that encircling marriage in love is not difficult but it requires effort. The importance of marriage enrichment programmes as asserted by Libhart (1980) is that "it requires personal change and to adjust. It is an opportunity for renewal with at least some mountaintop experiences in a growing positive relationship."²²

Emphasis should also be laid by counselors in such programmes on individual and collective responsibilities of couples. The meaning of the marriage vow to "hold, leave and cleave and live together" should be re-echoed regularly as well. All aspects of marriage like sex, money, communication, respect and humour should be treated regularly.²³ Premarital programmes should also be in place to prepare couples-to-be towards an intimate and lasting marital union as a preventive measure to technical divorce. Premarital counseling is necessary because it has lasting effect on the couples in understanding self, partners and marital relationship.²⁴

CONCLUSION

The issue of technical divorce among contemporary spouses is a reality. Desertion of spouse in a technical way is the summary description of the problem. The diverse ways it comes have been highlighted and the dangers of the menace cannot be over-emphasized because it can ruin lives and marital relationships. The key causes are betrayal of trust, public disgrace of spouse, lack of sexual fulfillment and communication breakdown. Counsellors are to help spouses prevent or cure technical divorce by helping them gain better understanding about the place of individual uniqueness in marriage. Spouses are also to be counseled on how to accept and appreciate each other. It also behoves a marriage counselor to regularly organize marriage enrichment programmes for the contemporary couples in order to keep marriages secure. Counsellors will perform their roles more effectively if they employ Pavelsky's model of crisis intervention appropriately.

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