

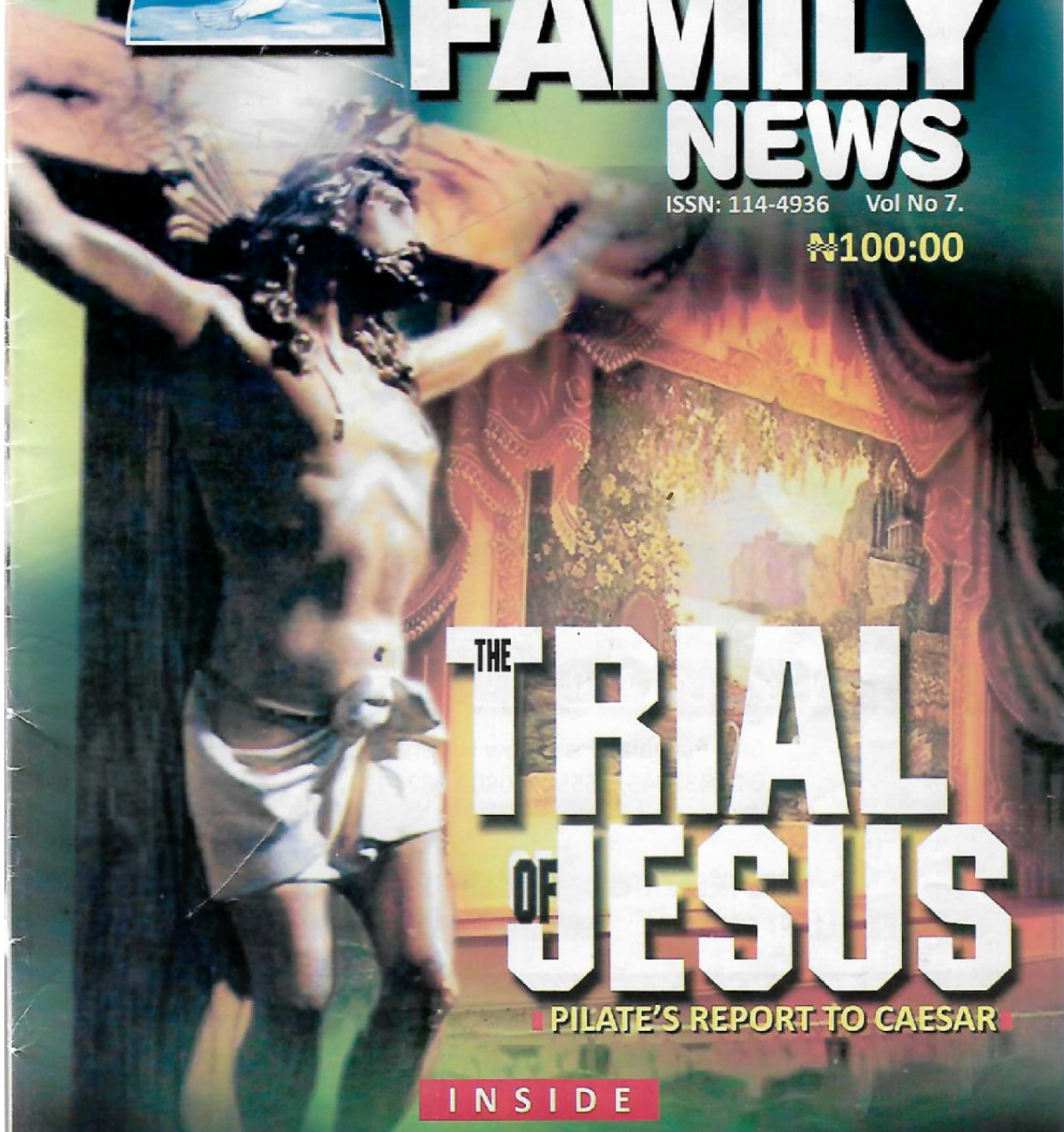


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WOMEN AS CATALYSTS OF PEACE IN THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

A PAPER DELIVERED BY

DR. MRS. VERO MOGBOH

TO ENUGU DIOCESSAN CATHOLIC WOMEN (CWO)

Preamble: Peace as we all know is the stress free accomplishment which is desired by both the old and young, men and women at individual, family, organizational and societal as well as at official cum non official environment. World inhabitants lay much emphasis on environmental equilibrium in consonance with the ecosystem and observed in the life of animals, birds, forests and water courses. Every thing created desires to be surrounded and exist in peace because they became out of tumultuous chasm.

The question that needs immediate answer is whether we have and can have peace at the desired rate in our

habitat? Peace is relative, wary of the fact that it is a begotten child of justice premised on love. God's love exemplified in creation equates thus: love = Justice = peace. True love (Agape) is a pre-requisite of justice and peace, because love is the root, justice the branches and peace the fruit. It is not funny that everyone keeps desiring peace, yet it is elusive and one of those ingredients of life lacked most at both the individual and societal levels.

The campaign on everyone's lips today is about peace; if it is not societal peace, it is green peace for tranquilizing the ecosystem, democracy and equity as in politics. We have United Nations Charters on rights of individuals, organizations and nations. There are peace treaties, peace keeping forces, new emerging studies showing strategies on conflict resolution and peace building/keeping skills for example Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). For humans, stress, crises, conflicts, wars and disasters have taken the position of peace in the society. The commonest news our media present is always on violence and catastrophes. The stories of rape, robbery, kidnap, suicide and other scandals earthquakes, wars, health disasters, cover the headlines of our newspapers and television screens. The most selling films are those that have negative impact on society. These are caused by a simple term "misunderstanding" leading to poor dialogue. These could be effectively handled and nipped in the bud at the base of society the family. We negate the fact that the bedrock of the society is the family and women (daughter, wife, mother) as the most integral enigma of any home. The society has failed to give women the chance to utilize their power and establish peace in the society. As a result all are paying the price, as majority are living in fear, apprehension, suspicion indecision and fracas. The absence of love and recognition is the genesis of chaos.

WOMEN AS HEART OF PEACE

Women are naturally endowed with the potential to act as mediators and arbitrators in bringing about and keeping peace in the society. They are the heart of homes and their moods and inclinations potentially influence members of the family on either positive or negative vibes. This vibrates out to societal functionality. Eve's creation makes it clear that Adam a male specie could not be fulfilled without a woman. From the book of Genesis to Revelation, from BC to AD, women have played integral part for the survival, thriving and sustenance of peace in human history. On the other hand, they could be constructs of conflict/confusion, defeat and death. Some of these women are Eve, Esther, Ruth, Blessed Virgin Mary, Hagar, Herodias etc. In contemporary times they are seen in politics, economics, religion, education and sports. Some of whom are Bhutto, Margaret Ekpo, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Paula White, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, Grace Alele Williams, Serena Williams etc. Today as in past society it will be very difficult for peace to exist without women playing a noble role, for they bear the continuity of human kind, they dictate what their

children will be in terms of character and reputation. Women are ambassadors of peace and war, exemplified in constructs of marriage bonds. Show me a society that is bereft of women, I will show you an incomplete society.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF PEACE

Conflict is seen and felt in family and community living but women are natural agents in building peace in the midst of conflict. Quietly reflect on the roles and responsibilities of women on a 24/7/Lifetime sequence i.e. twenty four hours daily, seven days weekly for their lifetime. They toil and sweat through the turmoil to harness some equilibrium, contending differentials in world view frames of their family members. Consequently, peace in the society starts from the grassroots, which are the individuals in the family. It is only when individuals are filled with peace that they can give same out to the society. If all families are due with peace, no doubt, it will have a ripple over effect to the society. On the contrary, where there is no peace in the life of individuals, it will not be possible for the society to experience peace. In general, no one can give what he/she does not have. Women are carriers and sowers of peace seed: "by their fruits you know them," a mango tree produces mangoes, so do other trees after their own kind.

A woman is the architect, bearer and pruner of fruits in the family and home. Women are the centre stage holding the families together as they possess the binding force that closes individual gaps in the home. Therefore, if any thing happens that a woman is removed from her position in the family, such family automatically loses balance, since they are custodians of values in such households. The home that loses balance becomes a harbinger of disorder and disaster. Their position in the family is sensitive to functions of peace moves and sustenance from the home platform to societal outburst.

However, if the custodian is not in good order, the entire household becomes dysfunctional and the general society will collapse as a result.

WOMEN'S DEMOCRATIZATION FUNCTION:

The society is never anything far from what the combination of families could give, so does the family from individuals in it. The wife, the mother is the constant companion and supporter/adviser of the husband. The head of the family, and the children who in the society may be a president/governor/banker/lawyer/priest/ teacher/ doctor/armed robber/19ner/philanthropist etc. listen to the mother.

Because of the relevance of women's active functions in nurturing family members, they ought to be fully involved/engaged in public affairs. Democratic societies are becoming aware of this by implementing policies that give minimum % of women involvement in various facets of elective and appointive posts. It is evident that any nation that fails to fully involve women in its policies and governance is classified as developing or underdeveloped. Genuine development and in particular peace- building is not only motivated by change in physical structures, but executed on

the value added effects of women involvement on platform of continuity envisaged in the family.

It is a fact that women have proved themselves as great catalysts in democratic set ups. They make the change and spread the change by their taciturnity in implementing good governance /organizational policies and projects that make grass root impact. In Nigeria, we have such women as Dora Akunyili in NAFDAC on the issue of adulterated drugs; Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on the beggarly issue of lifting the burden of external debts; Ndidi Okereke-Onyiluke on promoting shares liberalization; Marian Babangida on economic/social emancipation of women through "Better life for Women" etc. They had the opportunity to excel by their official appointive posts.

There are dozens of other unsung women in various capacities and non-governmental organizations who are struggling to impact positively on women, thereby the society. But more impressive are those in homes who through their exemplary minute toiling make a habit of improving their offsprings for better citizenry.

Likewise, the role of women in catalyzing economic development had been formalized in some countries. For example Liberia instituted a programme where only women could borrow subsidized funds for trading. Micro credit to men is very limited because statistical results of the earlier lending showed that when men receive funds they mismanage them and as a result create more burdens on the society.

Where most women used the proceeds of their business to buy new clothes for their children, send them to good schools, feed them better and even take care of their husbands needs in terms of housing etc. The women generally elevated the living standard of the household thus bringing in some measure of peace.

Similarly in Nigeria, government has made lending to women a crucial policy in its economic cum social development because they account for over fifty percent of grassroots' workforce.

Recently, the Cross River State's Governor's wife signed an MOU with three banks to offer their women liberal loans in terms of accessibility and repayment. In Enugu, the diocesan CWO has made great strides in giving its members such opportunity through an understanding with Umuchinemere Pro-Credit Micro Finance Bank.

LEADERSHIP/COMMUNICATION AS TOOLS OF PEACE

Cultural practices that restrained women were put in place in the attempt to stop them from exercising the powers they possess in nature/nurture work. The power of womanhood is so great that there is fear, if mishandled, it might cause serious torpedo in our chauvinistic society.

Women are endowed with natural intelligence and intuition, custodians of nurture and culture, great counsellors, brave, graceful, and persevering in their roles and responsibilities. Women need to replenish their leadership qualities to remain focused on their destined humble silent leadership in homes reminiscent of current democratic servant leader.

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