

# PEACE AND UNITY IN THE FAMILY VIS-A-VIS HUMAN RIGHTS

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## **Abstract**

*Peace and unity are the religious tenets necessary for coexistence in the family and society at large. There is no human family or society that worth the name if these religious tenets are missing. The idea of peace and unity necessarily implies the rights of the human person to live, move about and express himself unrestrained by any person, institution or law. This paper submitted that peace and unity in the family are ingredients for peace and unity in the wider society and concluded that every family should strive to entrench and practice these religious virtues.*

Some families today lack peace and unity. A lot of marriages have broken as a result of lack of peace and unity and the consequence on the offspring from these families and the wider society is great. The family is the smallest unit of the society, therefore if something essential for growth and peaceful coexistence is lacking in the family it, logically translates into the society.

The objective of this paper is to explore the social teachings of the Christian family on peace and unity in the family, the measures towards achieving peace and unity in the family and how this can help achieve peace in the society. This paper also looks at human right as a fallout of peace and unity

## **Definition of Terms**

**Peace:** According to Uche (2009), peace is a household name in the family, it is a state of harmony characterized by the lack of violent, conflict, commonly understood as the absence of hostility. Peace also suggests the existence of healthy or newly healed. Peace is the practice of love. In a peaceful society people would work together to resolve conflict, develop morally, treat each other with justice, satisfy basic needs and respect each other. In essence they would live in unity. Where there is no peace, there is a real disorder. Such state of affairs hampers growth in all its forms. It retards the growth of the family in all forms.

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**Unity:** According to Weheier, Mcintosh, Turnbull and Ashby (2005), unity is the state of being in agreement and working together; the state of being joined together to form one unit. If unity is achieved in a family, its members must have shared values. Unity cut across peace, when one talks of peace, unity follows, because when a family is at peace they are bound to be united, in other words unity cannot be devoid of peace. Unity is violence free; when there is unity in a family there will be stability of every form.

**Family:** Family consists of father, mother and children if any. It is a unit based on procreative partnership of sexes, the family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. The family derives from the social nature of the human person. A person normally comes into the world within a family and can be said to owe to the family the very fact of his/her existing as an individual. The family is the first and basic expression of a person's social nature. Oha (2008), affirmed that the family is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion.

### **Social Teachings of the Christian Family towards Peace and Unity**

According to Nzomiwu (1995), Christian marriage is a vocation. It is a legitimate union of man and woman for both physical and spiritual companionship. A vocation is an invitation by God to a particular service. In fact it is a call to holiness. Couples must bear this in mind every time. Vatican II describes marriage vocation as an intimate partnership of life and love between a man and a woman, total and perpetual, rooted in irrevocable personal consent of the spouses and which by its very nature is ordained for procreation and education of the children. It is pertinent to note that marriage begets family, the family originates in a marital communion. Gen. 2:24 expresses also the fact that a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. The family which results from this union draws its inner solidity from the covenant between the spouses. Marriage is a covenant, which signifies partnership, communion and love. It is a covenant of love, love is and must be the strength and the environment under which marriage stability hold on. The stronger and deeper this mutual love, the more stable the family becomes. The couples ought to be vigilant in their family to ensure that this love is cherished and nurtured. This is because lack of stability in most families is as a result of decay of love.

The wife should help her husband grow in his appreciation of their marital love and responsibility. She would be kind, respectful, loving and obedient to her husband. She should really be a helpmate (Gen. 2:23). The husband should be able to say of his wife as Adam did. "This is the flesh of my flesh and the bone of my bone".

Husband and wife should be as united as Christ is united with the church. (Eph. 5:26). The husband expects his wife to be dedicated and committed, to be prayerful, chaste, hospitable and disciplined. All these qualities make up stability in a family. The wife should have a good reputation and be a careful minister of her home. She should be a model clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and be able to bear with her husband. She should have a forgiving heart (Col. 13:12) because the quality of her family lies in her hand.

### **Measures towards Achieving Peace and Unity in the Christian Family**

Some families or couples have little more in common than the marriage certificate and the dwelling they share. Some marriages are casualties of mounting stress and anxiety. Demanding jobs, shift work, and long working hours can sap the emotional reserves of some devoted couples. Love and respect can also be ordered by financial problems, issues with children, job changes and health problems. However, the changes that come with the passing of time may create the kind of stress that can push couples apart. Stress and exhaustion leave family mates very little time for each other. Some feel as if they were being sucked into a vortex of frustration and alienation. Why are so many families under much pressure? What can one do to achieve peace and unity in the family? The answer to this question is given by God himself who is the author and originator of marriage. (Psalm 119:105, Ephesians 5:21-33; 2 Timothy 3:16 3:16). Odii (2009), stated that Bible principles can help guide one along a peaceful and united home. Man is imperfect, misunderstandings and differences are inevitable.

Often, however, a peaceful and united family depends less on compatibility than on how couples deal with incompatibility. Therefore, one of the most essential skills in a family is the ability to resolve disagreement in a loving way, for love bears everything together in perfect harmony. Colossians 3:14. Husband and wife should do the following:

- (a) **Speak Respectfully:** “there exists the one speaking thoughtlessly as with the stabs of a sword, but the tongue of the wise ones is a healing” (Proverbs 12:18). Researchers have found that most conversations end the way they started. Hence, if a conversation starts respectfully, it is more likely to end that way. Conversely, you know how hurtful it can be when a loved one speaks thoughtlessly to you. Therefore, make a prayerful effort yourself to speak with dignity, respect and affection. (Ephesians 4:31). Even though you see each other’s weakness, try to respect each other in word and attitude. That has helped some to build a peaceful home.

- (b) **Show Humility:** do nothing out of contentiousness or out of egotism, but with lowliness of mind considering that the others are superior. (Philippians 2:3). Many conflicts arise because marriage mates pridefully try to blame their partner for problems instead of humbly seeing ways to make things aright for each other lowliness of mind, or humility can help one suppress the urge to insists on being right in a disagreement.
  
- (C) **Do not Hastily Take Offense:** do not hurry yourself in your spirit to become offended. (Ecclesiastes 7:9). Try to avoid the inclination to refute your mates' viewpoint or to leap to your own defense if your mate questions something you have said or done. Instead, listen to and acknowledge your mate's expressions. Think carefully before making a reply. Many couples learn too late in life that wining a heart is a greater victory than wining an argument.
  
- (4) **Listen with Empathy:** rejoice with people who rejoice; weep with people who weep". (Romans 12:15). Empathy is indispensable to purposeful communication because it enables one feel his/her spouse deepest emotions. It can help create an atmosphere in which each one's opinion and feelings are treated with respect and dignity". When problems are discussed, spouses should listen very carefully so as to understand the thoughts and feelings. It is right to keep quiet and to listen with empathy.
  
- (5) **Forming the Habit of Expressing Appreciation:** show yourself thankful (Colossians: 3:26,15). Strong marriages are characterized by husbands and wives who make sure their spouse feels appreciated. Some couples neglect this vital aspect of communication and merely assume that their spouse feels valued. Wives in particular need their husband's loving reassurance and expression of appreciation. Husbands can do much to improve the health of their families and their well-being.
  
- (6) **Be Quick to Forgive:** let the sun not set with you in a provoked state. (Ephesians 4:26). In a family one cannot escape one's own faults or those of one's spouse. Consequently, the willingness to forgive is essential. An ancient proverb wisely observes "it is beauty...to pass over transgression". A good and peaceful home is impossible without forgiveness. Otherwise resentment and mistrust grow, and that is poison to the family. Through forgiveness, the bonds of family are strengthened and grow closer together. Wherever mistakes are made do not conclude that he or she will get over it. Making peace often requires that you do one of the more difficult things by admitting that you have made a mistake. Nevertheless, find a way humbly to say something like this: I am sorry, dear.

- 7) **Stay Committed to your Mate and to your Marriage:** the husband and wife are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together man must not put apart” (Matthew 19:6). You have solemnly vowed before God and man and to each other to remain together, despite problems that might arise. Commitment, however, is not simply a legalistic obligation, rather, it is motivated by sincere heartfelt love and is a reflection of respect and honour for each other and for God. So never undermine your sacred marital relationship by flirting: have eyes only for your mate (Matthew 5:28).
- 8) **Self-sacrifice Reinforces Commitment:** keep an eye, not in your personal interest but also in the interest of others” (Philippians 2:4). Putting your marriage mate’s needs and preferences ahead of your own is one of the ways to strengthen commitment. At times husbands should help wives in doing some of the domestic chores. With all these measures, peaceful and united home could be achieved.

### **Roles of Each Party towards Enhancing a Peaceful and United Christian Family**

A peaceful and united Christian family is an enviable one in the sense that its component members perform their expected roles. The stability consequent on this is often extended to the larger society. In this section attention is turned to how the husband/father, wife/mother and children relate with each other.

### **The Husband/Father**

The husband in a family is a father: a father both to his wife and children. He is a man of responsibilities-religious, social, economic, and political. Ejiofor (2001), affirmed that “he is the president of the household and the representative of the family in public affairs. He is the pillar of security for the members of his family and absorbs all shocks and quarrels coming to the family from outside. Therefore it is expected of him to be benevolent and tolerant, understanding and impartial in the management of the family affairs” (p.34). The importance of benevolence, tolerance and impartiality as expected characteristics of a father cannot be over emphasized. As the head of the family any visible sign of repression or partiality in relating with the family members would create an unwholesome environment and the consequences would be grave. Favouritism is a terminal disease in a family fabric.

The head of a family relates with the family on religious grounds. He performs religious functions such as offering of sacrifices for his own sake and that of his entire family. Socially, the father is aware that children learn more by imitation than by any formal lecture. What children see their parents do, what they hear their parents say and how they observe their parents behave so they do, talk and behave. Ejiofor continues, “it behooves the husband/father, therefore, as the family symbol to

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be an embodiment of virtues rather than vices". Such virtues would include reliability, a sense of decision, precision, a sense of adventure and self-reliance. These virtues are of very high dividend when imbibed by the children: boys and girls. The father therefore advises the children on how best to live in the home. Paternal advice and supervision cannot be neglected as they have tremendous influence on the family. The father as a thin-god and an uncontested symbol of authority has the ability to inculcate good virtues into his family.

Obiefuna (1995), maintained that a husband/father cannot claim to socially relate with his family if he does not make provisions for daily food, clothing, housing education, (informal thought) medical attention, love, motivation and inspiration for the family members to achieve great height in the outer society. To neglect these areas is to make the family lose faith in him. Again every man therefore strives to have a strong economic base. He can be a farmer, a trader or wine tapper. He can also combine many trades to achieve his purpose. The important thing is that he is to the family and the larger society a hardworking and struggling man. He is also the administrative officer of his family. He administers justice in the event of family quarrels, in settling disputes he is expected to be truly impartial. Anything short of this sows the seed of discord and unhealthy rivalry in the family. The security of his family rests on him. As such no outsider can insult or assault any member of his family without giving him his due respect by first warning the concerned family member through him. He is a symbol of unity, an embodiment of love and a tower of encouragement and inspiration for the family. He knows that what he says or does would have lasting effect on the family. He becomes cautious, patient, good humoured, self-controlled, dedicated and principled . at the same time, he disciplines and apply restraints on any who may dance out of tune.

### **Wife/Mother**

According to Obiefuna (1995), the wife is expected to live according to the rules of the present household. To deviate from them is to risk being accused of indulgence in abominable act capable of attracting both the wrath of God and social stigma. The woman owes her husband every respect and obedience. She submits to total conjugal possession of the husband. She bears and rears children and cooperates in the economic well-being of the family. Before the children become independent they are within lap's control of their mother. Just as the family is the primary unit of socialization, the children stay more with her when the father is in the fields. Through the method of reward and punishment, she approves and disapproves of children's actions. She equally tells them stories that extol virtues of hard work and excellence, a sense of good morals, respect for customs and tradition, loyalty to elders, the mode of greeting, sitting behaviour, she takes extra care of the female children who must learn from her the technical skills and moral proprieties necessary to become good wives and mothers later in life.

The influence of mother on children is encompassing. The children's moral, religious, social, ethical, economic and intellectual well-being are in the mother's hands. Their future destiny is shaped by the mothers. In other words, it can be said that the future of any society lies with mothers. Good wives/mothers are therefore important for a good society. Ifesieh (2005), stated that "just as the family is the seed of the society, so also is the mother the cell of the family. With some note of filial passion he concluded, and correctly too that a good mother is a most precious possession in a family. She is the heart and opulence of the family.

Wikipedia (2011), noted that wives should try as much to attend to their husbands' needs or fatigue, hunger and thirst. Good wives give encouragement of support to their husbands.

### **Children**

From birth to about the age of six, child lives a life of unquestionable obedience. All the children irrespective of their gender stay and sleep with the mother except in some exceptional cases when a child at a very tender age gets inclined to the father. The children interact freely; they play, bath, work and sleep together. This is a very crucial period in the formation of children. They learn and are encouraged to live virtuously. All parents want their children to be upright, honest, kind and helpful to others and will spare no pain to instill these qualities. Some adults prefer to remain childless than to have children, who will bring shame and dishonour to the family. At this primary formative period therefore, parents do not overlook any seeming odd behaviour in a child for to do that would be to lose control in the after years. Whatsoever one would be in life can be discerned at this period.

Obiefuna (1995), noted that at about the age of six, sex differentiation sets in. Sex becomes the basis for role differentiation. Each male/female child is assigned his/her roles in the family. More importantly the male children are made to imitate their father while the female ones imitate their mother. This differentiation and initiation into different roles in life does not in any way mean disharmony in the family. No it rather means that when each does his/her expected work the family will have a function of a closely knit unit. The differentiation makes the male children do jobs that would prepare them for the roles of leadership in the household. From the earliest days they comport themselves as masters and superiors to the female children who will be married out to the "lower" place of wives. The female children are domestic oriented. As future mothers they keep the house, making it comfortable for all. They cook, scrub the floors and walls and sweep the compound. They receive instructions and directions from the mothers who at times give helping hand. They fetch water for domestic use. It has to be pointed out that in spite of the differentiation, there is no clear-cut separation of duties in family relationship

between the male and female children. If anything the, separation is only virtual. Any child can do whatever work depending on availability. Nzomiwu (1995), noted that children are called to be obedient to their parents.

Irrespective of their gender and despite their call to be obedient, they still have their rights as stipulated in Nigeria constitution, all these rights ought to be safeguarded; right to education, right to life, right to be protected and so on.

### **Attitude towards Husbands in Enhancing Peace and Unity in the Family**

There must be unity between the wife and her husband, and this will be transmitted naturally to their children. Wives should not plan against their husbands; they should not create friction between themselves and their husbands in the presence of their children. They should learn to settle their frictions without letting their children know. A good mother and wife, should be shock absorbers trying to cope with all the friction and difficulties of the family life. Offiah (1995), affirmed that the grace of God is with us through the sacrament of matrimony: pray often for God is with us through the sacrament of matrimony; pray often for God's help. She continued wives should show respect and meekness to their husbands, they should remember that they are their first children and pamper them like children. They should always try to be attractive in order to keep their husbands at home. Wives should not send their husbands away by their shabby looks. A husband always wants that beautiful girl he courted, and wives must try to retain their beauty no matter their position or age. It is true that women have their right as enshrined in Nigeria Constitution but whenever they want to exercise such rights over their husbands, they must do that with caution and love in order not to bring disintegration in their homes. Always bear in mind that they are the ministers of finance, external affairs and so on.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children if any constantly pray for this gift of stability, because matrimonial stability is often threatened by many forces. Such like discord, spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, conflict, hatred, separation and even by divorce. It is the duty of the spouses to protect their marriage and family from these threats. To do this and ensure stability husband and wife need divine grace. It is by following Christ, renouncing themselves and taking up their cross that spouses will receive the grace of God and gift of stability in the family. Couples should realize that Christ dwells with them and he has given them the strength to follow him, to rise again after they have fallen, To forgive one another, bear one another's burdens, to be subject to one another and so on, helps in building peace and unity in the family.



The awareness of the responsibility of the parties that makes up the family is quite crucial the father, mother and children must realize that each has a role to play and must be prepared to carry the cross that goes with it. For the realization of peace and unity is the fruit of endurance, hard work, fraternal love, forgiveness, commitment and divine worship in prayer in the family.

### **Recommendations**

The family is a valuable human and social institution. She has a lot of roles to play both within and in the larger society. In the light of this, this paper submits the following recommendations:

- (a) The sanctity of the family must be maintained
- (b) As a domestic church and a miniature society, the family should be understood as the best school where moral values and societal ethos are taught and transmitted.
- (c) The family is the most important unit in the society, hence any tendency or disposition that could destroy it must be discarded.
- (d) The family should be made the centre of peace and unity that the society should copy from. For instance the unity and peace between father and mother, children and parents, children and children should be a model for the society.
- (e) Human right should be entrenched in the family as this would eventually translate to human right in the society.
- (f) The union between husband and wife should be upheld. Divorce of separation should be discouraged, in this way we would be building a society of responsible human beings.

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