

CATHOLIC WOMEN AND REBRANDING PROJECT IN ARCHDIOCESE OF ONITSHA, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Women are already empowered by God with the grace, wisdom, zeal and other spiritual instruments or weapons ab initio. They are among the creatures born into the world representing something new, unique, peculiar and distinct. Tradition over the centuries laid foundations which past generations have based the roles and vocation of women in Igboland in particular and Nigeria in general. The cumulative force of these cultural attitudes, behaviour, norms and values about women has made women seen rather than heard. This thinking seems to cut across religion, economy, politics and other spheres of social structure of our society. In the rebranding project of Nigeria, a lot is witnessed in the transformation process of the country through the enormous achievements of the Catholic women in Nigeria. In this study, effort is made to outline the numerous contributions of women, especially the Catholic Women of Onitsha Archdiocese in the rebranding project.

Keywords: Catholic Women, Rebranding, Onitsha Archdiocese, Nigeria, Religion

Introduction

Women generally are special gift from God. They are unique and endowed with the natural powers to bring positive changes in the society. However, the female folk are being undermined and relegated to the background. Uche (2011) classifies such biased thinking as obnoxious labels which have fueled class struggle and distinction in a pluralistic society. For instance, in Igbo traditional setting, there is a division of labour among sex lines. The men are fully involved in ascribing roles that determine them as engaging in farming, fishing or hunting. The women are at home taking care of house chores or doing weeding

or cultivating women's crops like coco yam. With the advent of the missionaries, there was a societal change including that of women's roles check different social spheres in Nigeria. Many churches were developed with their various organizations, upholding the Rabbinical teachings of great importance in our Lord's teaching and attitude concerning women. He put women on the same equality with men and demanded the same way of salvation. For instance, the book of Acts 1:14, women were involved in the upper room and received the gift of the power of the Holy spirit on the Pentecost day. In the same vein, Galatians (3:28) corroborates with that, "there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female for ye are all one in Jesus Christ". Here he tried to eliminate the inequality between sexes in the ministry of Christ. Munro (1995) conforms this when he says that, "an individual is either a man or woman that is created in the image of God but man or woman hence a man without a woman cannot render a complete ministry of God" (p.62). Therefore, both sexes perform divine responsibility irrespective of whom one is and is answerable to one's duty. As it is true of Luke's gospel, women played prominent roles in the ministry of apostles. Harnack (1908) says that "no one who reads New Testament can fail to notice that in the Apostolic and sub-apostolic age, women played an important role in the propaganda of Christianity and throughout the Christian communities (p. 64). He presents a new perception of women as active participants in the ministry of the apostles. These women who excelled in the ministry of kingdom of God were Mary mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14), Tabitha (Acts 1:36), Mary the mother of John (Act 12:12), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), Lydia (Acts 16: 11-15), Dammaris (Acts 16: 11-15), Timothy's mother (Acts 16:1) to mention but a few. However, though women were generally regarded as passive members of the society, today they are playing tremendous roles towards the development of the church and society at large. In the rebranding project of Nigeria, a lot is witnessed in the transformation process of the country through the enormous achievements of the Catholic women in Nigeria. The Catholic women shall be examined in their contemporary contributions towards upholding and bringing sanity to our nation, Nigeria.

Catholic Women In Social Responsibility

In the social realm, the Catholic women perform the task of mothers, wives, education and so on. Catholic Women over the years are able to combine these amiable roles. Mbiti (1988) affirms that "women are extremely valuable in the sight of society, not only do they bear life, but they nurse, they cherish, they give

warmth, they care for life, since all human pass through their own bodies" [p.69]. Concurrently Egbujie [1998] portrays women as the life blood of the entire humanity, molders of character, the first teachers, sustainer and maintainers of every household. Corroborating further, Acholonu [1993] sees women as the power key that must never be allowed to explode due to their ability to combine several roles to function in various capacities within the society. As wives, the society depends so much on their strength and resilience as the matrix of life in its varied diversion. Thus she concludes "motherhood is the anchor, the matrix, the foundation on which all else rests in the African society and especially the family" [p 25].

The Catholic women help in the maintenance of family life and relationship. They facilitate or hinder changes in the family's social life. The Catholic women as wives and mothers are also the help - mate to their husbands. Biblically, the creation of the world was incomplete until a woman was created to perfect God's mission and vision which resulted to joy, companionship, multiplicity (life) and socialization. Ezenweke (2014) opines that "the presence of the women filled the lack the man had experienced. Thus the women brought about the first change experienced by man and so divinely endowed instrument and enforcer of change"(p.61). They assist them in providing biological needs and physical care for the family. They shower him with love, thereby maintain peaceful homes. The children enjoy the same love. They are trained with the fear of the God. The book of Proverb said, "train up a child in the way he should follow and when he is old, he will never depart from it" [22.6]. They scold where necessary but with love, they endure so many things in the family in order to keep, life going and sustenance of the family. They provide the pleasurable things needed for their children according to their capacities. An Igbo adage says that a woman has no money when the problem has not gotten to her child. A woman can go extra miles in order to meet the demands of her child. They are important determinants of cause of social change. Children cannot withstand the cries of their mothers. So, delinquent child can easily be bent at the sight of his mothers' cries.

The Catholic women engage in child socialization and general up-bringing. Giddens [1989] and Musgrove [1979] unanimously agreed that primary socialization starts from the family. So within the family circle, the Catholic women, been mothers, appear to play a prominent role. In elucidating further, Azikiwe [1989] , confirmed that women are responsible for the education and up keep of their children. They socialize their children by teaching them their

language and traditions. It is pertinent to know that children are always nearer to their mothers. They easily dictate the needs, happiness and desires of their children. Therefore, the primary responsibility of every Catholic woman is child training. So they socialize their children in learning their native languages and their traditions. The training includes eating habit, family manner, obeying the elders and dos and don'ts of the family, society and church. In fact, they are responsible for inculcating the norms and mores of the society into their children. They go extra mile to ensure that the children are strong, healthy and monitor them until adulthood to ensure that they are after Godly, reasonable and responsible great adults.

The Catholic women help in maintenance of social ethics. Their responsibilities extend to themselves by rendering supportive services especially young mothers. The young mothers who cannot differentiate their left and right gets well informed of their marital responsibilities in their respective homes, communities and their society. They see that their member's live life of emulation [models] in the society. They live exemplary lives which are evidently expressed and experienced in their working places, market places and wherever they are seen. They comply with this in order to maintain their integrity as a Catholic mothers and role models. The Catholic women offer social services to themselves as well as non- members of the town. They assist to promote the welfares of the others as they rally round any member who has accident, bereaved and or incapacitated especially the aged. A solidarity support of cash kind and bodily presence is administered to this effect. In joy and celebration, they also attend wedding ceremonies of their children, ordination of the priests, wedding anniversary of their members, non- members and also priests. Thus they portray organized efforts to advance a better human welfare.

They develop and improve the conditions of their rural women and youths. They are well informed with the effects and dangers of prostitution and child trafficking. Oduyeye [1986] opines, "we are faced with the issue of child trafficking and abuse, all hands must be on desk to eradicate this hydra- headed predicament of the third millennium society" [p 23], The Catholic women in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations have made a reputable achievement through enlightenment campaign against these perpetrators of the crime. Seminars and lectures have been organized by these Catholic women for the notice of youths and women themselves with the ultimate goal of bringing these crimes to a halt. These are help in respective youth forums. Rehabilitation centers have been provided for victims of sex hawkers, child abuse, and pre-

marital pregnancy.

Catholic Women In Economic Activities

Christian women entrepreneurs play a significant role in economic development in Nigeria. The attribute, "women as help-mates" is fully understood in the economic activities of these women. The Catholic women engage in different occupations and professions that will yield or earn income for up-keep of the family, and improvement of society at large. This ranges from petty trade to any profession in the world. In the family, the Catholic women help their husband to carry out some of the projects in the family. Some of these women are the breadwinners of the families. They carry out this responsibility without bearing any grudges. This Acholonu [1993] opines that women's life's calls for constant sacrifice. Nowadays, Catholic women are evidently seen in the streets stooping very low in performing very meaner jobs that will earn them money for the up-keep of the family. The Catholic women ensure mobilization of fund for community development through community based co-operative programmes. They form co-operative society in order to attract the presence of government in their communities. The garri processing machines were given by the former wife of Anambra State Mrs. Margareth Obi. Those in the riverine area are not left out for materials for farming, fishing, and piggery were given to them. They thereby boost the economy of nation through agriculture.

The Catholic women establish small scale enterprises. These women who are not opportune to further their education are otherwise engage in these profitable ventures. They engage in production of cellophane papers of all size which are in high demands. There is also sewing institute which absorb both male and female individuals in the society. In accordance with the modernism and globalization, the Catholic women are not found wanting in the establishment of computer centers. With these, the individuals in the society are also benefactors with the modern demand of being computer literate. They provide employment opportunities for some of jobless citizens in Nigeria.

The Catholic women also participate in self-help economic project and programmes. Thus, creating employment for wealth creation in diverse economy. This is in the production of detergents, Vaseline and candles. These women also make weavens and supply to urban markets like main market Onitsha. Bead making whether ordinary or sacramental is a welcome development. They supply the sacramental beads to parish bookshops and

markets at large. Not only do they benefit from these ventures but their children and Nigeria at large. This on the other hand minimized the unemployment problem in the country for this has fetched employment and self-reliance to them and especially the youths. Thus Oderinde [1996] averred that "without any in-house man to assist, the women headed household, has to fend for themselves for survival"[p.73]. The crafts serve as survival strategies for these Christian women and their children who cannot pave their way further in education.

The economic responsibility of Catholic women can be witnessed in the indulgence in agricultural programme and other fund raising activities for economic sustenance of the society. The Catholic women get grants and loans for agriculture from the state government like Better Life Programme at Abuja and United Bank for Africa [UBA] with its credit scheme for rural women. Through their able leaders (C.W.O. Presidents both General and Zones), fertilizer, improved seedling and cassava stems are distributed to their members and non-members of the community. The federal government agricultural project, FADAMA is waxing strong in Anambra state, precisely, Ogbaru, Anambra west, Anambra East and Ayamelum local Government area of Anambra state. The beneficiaries are mostly Catholic women in various localities.

However, the Catholic women contribute immensely in health care development in Nigeria society. Okonjo [1991] avers that these women are the forefront of health care delivery particularly to children. In fact, right from the olden days' women are great achievers in medicine. Hobson [1948] posits that "traditionally, child birth remains in the hands of the village women, because doctors, nurses, and other auxiliaries exist when the women might have done their capacity" [p.34]. Recently the Catholic women have much sympathy for healthcare development. This could be attributed to the peculiar nature of women themselves and possibly the deteriorating health situations and anti-social diseases prevalent in the country such as cancer, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) child mortality, child and drug abuse, prostitution, abortion to mention but a few. To buttress further Me Guire and Popkin [1988] note that women are the implementers of the child - survival revolution and the success of any expanded immunization programme launched in Nigeria is 100% dependent on the mother's ability to implement that as evidently shown on that launched in 1985. They have formed themselves into groups in collaboration with some associations and organizations for health development such as Medical Women Associate of Nigeria [TAIWAN], Common- Wealth Nurses Federation [CNF], World Young Women Christian association [WYWCA], African Medical and

Research Foundation [AMRF] and et cetera. They also educate and create awareness of these deadly diseases in both the young and old, their prevention, treatment and management discussed. This strives mainly during August meetings where experts and professionals render such assistance.

Catholic Women In Psychological Development

The Catholic women are policy makers on the issues relating to women such as women empowerment and violence against women viz rape, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, child abuse, widowhood, child trafficking, human rights and so on. Women marginalization worldwide has been abated through the tireless efforts of these women. These are evidently witnessed in the outcome of the women empowerment principles that promotes gender equality and empowerment of women in the workplace, market place and community. Women are empowered to participate fully in economic life in all sectors of the economy. In Anambra State, there is women development Center Awka meant for the affairs of women in the state. Also in Beijing Conference on women in 1995 in China for equality, development and peace. All these, are efforts embarked by women to discuss and formulate impediments to their rights as human beings and gender in the society. These women generally are no longer ignorant of their rights as the gap of gender inequality in women has been abrogated.

The Catholic women address gender stereotyping, physical development across the female life cycle. There are certain negative ideas or issues that children exhibit which affect their styles. These are the issues of inferiority complexities, professional disparities and so on. The Catholic women through counseling have to debus such notions out of them. The children may be faced of having some professional problems specifically made for certain sexes, the mother has to intimate them rightly with instances of those who have attained such positions not minding the sex. To those with inferiority complex, with encouragement, they will overcome such trait.

For the physical development across the female life cycle, the Catholic women have a lot of responsibilities towards themselves and their daughters. Women have common interest and physical structures. They share common views and opinions. The opinions and advices shared especially the younger ones go a long way in moulding their future characters. The therefore these puberty stage in females or women is very delicate and if handled well yields positive changes in their lives. Children establish secure bond with their mothers and that help them develop into healthier adults in cognitive, emotional, intellectual and social

capabilities from infancy to the old age.

The Catholic women engage and ensure the mobilization for mass literacy. They have plans and activities for the sensitization of their members and non-members and promoting mass literacy. They organize retreats and seminars to this effect. During this activity, the members are advised to come with their neighbours. A lot of women having participated in these forums enter universities especially the drop - outs while some enroll in different adult education centers/ schools to update their knowledge. Another inspiring factor is the call of most of their leaders to be literate mothers especially the key positions. This has gone a long way towards encouraging them to pursue education to a great extent. Also they are empowered spiritually and otherwise with different types of lectures that boost them in educating their children and others around them.

Funding and mobilization of education of the motherless and orphans is an aspect of educational responsibility of the Catholic women. These women are the mothers of the motherless and defense of the defenseless in the society. Each year, they map out certain numbers of motherless children and orphans to sponsor their education up to university level. Such gesture is also extended to benefactors in the seminaries up to priesthood, if God- willing.

The Catholic women monitor the activities of community schools to ensure good standard of education. This they do by selecting some of the members among them to see to teaching and learning of both government primary and secondary schools in the community. These people are to ensure that there are enough teachers, find out their problems, their performances and so on. They write out reports of their findings and send to their members which they will now deliberate on them and render assistance in terms of counseling and finance where necessary. They take up rehabilitation of any building or reconstruction of new building. Therefore, they help in assisting the federal government in ensuring good standard of education in the society, especially now that the federal government is embarking on Quality Assurance Programs in school whether private or government.

To crown it all, some of the schools both Private and Government owned in Onitsha Archdiocese are being managed by Reverend Sisters like Queen of the Rosary College (Q.R.C.) to be precise. The graduants both morally and academically excel in their various disciplines and fields of endeavors in Nigeria. Thus, contributing their quota in the rebranding process in Nigeria.

Catholic Women in Political Spheres

The Catholic women involvement and participation in power and decision making in Nigeria in both state and national levels is in the minority level despite the fact that women comprise the majority of the electorates. The Catholic women participation in politics is vital because it provides a path to power and political decision making. It leads to participation in parliament and other elected bodies as well as nominations to positions in cabinet and other political offices and judiciary. In the pre-colonial and colonial periods in Nigeria, many women had occupied leadership position, yielded tremendous impacts in the political spheres of life of the people such as Queen Dauranama, the ruler of the state of Daura, Queen Amina of Zaria, the Alafinlya- Ikere, (in charge of king's treasure and royal insignia), Egbelyalade (association of first ladies-political pressure groups), Omu (queen), Umu-ada, Madam Tinubu and so on. Despite the empowerment like world conference on Women in Beijing, the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, no women have ascribed the status of the presidency in Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that a lot of Christian women themselves have established political networks building linkages among grass roots organizations, women movements and female politicians, The pre independent of Nigeria in 1957 usher women political activist viz Janet Mokelu and Young as members of Eastern House of Assembly. The Christian Women have occupied sensitive positions in the country in this 21st Century in Anambra State such as Governors, ministerial posts, Local Government Chairman, Counsellors, Senators, House of Representatives and Assembly. These are Dame Virgy Etiaba, Late Dora Akunyili, Ngozi Okonji Iwuala, Calista Nwachukwu, Joy Emordi, Stella Oduah, Doris Nwabili; to mention but a few. These women have proved themselves much competent in the management of public affairs and ability to elevate the general community and Nigeria in intellect, virtue, political activity and efficiency.

The political aspect of Catholic women can as well be viewed in their active participation on issues related to the selection of leaders in the church and society. Amucheazi (1991) avers that "under the political education and programme, the director of social mobilization has been trying to make the masses to be politically aware socially conscious and physically organized into popular organizations for defense of democratic rights and social justice" (p.20).

To this, the leaders of these Catholic women mobilize a lot of their members during elections electioneering campaigns and they come out massively to vote during elections. A good example, during the governorship election in 2010, a lot of Catholic women leaders were used as overseers in many pooling centres because of their sincerity and moral integrity which returned Peter Obi into power for second tenure.

However, at various churches, the Catholic women are fully represented for instance in the Catholic Church, the secretary of most Parish councils are mainly women (secretaries of Catholic Women Organizations) who are duty conscious and handy at any point in time. Other Christians in their organizations such as the Women Guild, Four Square Women International, the Women Missionary Union of Nigeria Baptist Church, the Good Women Association of Christ Apostolic Church of Nigeria, Mother Union of Anglican Church and so on, decisions on selection are done by their organizations themselves by casting of votes. Their participation has contributed immensely towards ensuring peaceful governance in the society and church. On the other hand, these Catholic women wax strangely in rejecting policies and issues affecting developmental changes and challenges. This is done through their crucial roles in dethroning erring leaders. They are the no nonsense types. Any leader who is no longer performing according to the stipulated guidelines is relieved of duty out rightly and a new leadership enthroned. The mass population of these Catholic women at almost every sectors of the economy is an added advantage to their majority opinions in decision making in the society. Therefore, they are able to out win and stand firm by their decisions in Igboland, the "Umuokpu" or "Umuada" (daughters of the soil) are mostly Catholic who administer justice and peace in their father's kindred without fear or favour. Their decisions are adhered strictly by the community members. Thus Catholic women are actively involved and participated in the initiating and formulating issues and policies for the developmental changes in Nigeria.

The Catholic Women also play arbitration roles in times of conflicts. They perform this through empowering stable marriages among old and newly wedded couples. This is made possible through the invitation of seasoned resource persons like the clergy, priest, medical and paramedical staff, educationist and psychologist for marriage counseling from time to time. According to Ani (1989), "functional education implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows"(p-21). They organize lectures, symposiums and retreats especially on stability of marriage. The knowledge obtained thereafter

helps them to develop new outlook and better perspective on how to plan their family without any hazards; thereby making their husbands grow in appreciation of their marital love and responsibility. During these occasions formal invitations are given to members who have divorce cases. By so doing, they are able to stabilize their homes through counseling. The women concerned learnt to do everything humanly possible to save their marriages as Nzomiwu (1995) states "a good Christian mother should therefore constantly endear herself to her husband and be prepared to sacrifice her personal comfort for the good and stability of her marriage"(p.22). In the community, other women (Christians and non-Christians) with similar case cases do seek counsel from them especially those with similar cases. This kind gesture and "model" foster evangelism and conversion into Christianity amongstthe beneficiaries (pagans).

However, the Catholic Women extends their counseling roles to the clergy priest and other workers in the house of God. They offer fervent prayers and advice in their pastoral duties. In view of the above aforementioned, Catholic women have some potentials and rights to contribute meaningful to the development of their country. This is evidently seen in their representation in Nigerian government though it's still low compared to what obtains in other counties of the world particularly in the developed nations.

Catholic Women in Spiritual Life

The Catholic women are divinely endowed and are outstanding in spiritual development which is exhibited in life and actions. As Ekwunife (1995) observes that "Christian spirituality is a faith experience and response to God's revelatory definite actions in Jesus Christ mediated through the witness of the church under the guidance of the spirit" (p.42). The Catholic women help to organize Catechism classes, Sunday schools and other formative exercises in the church and society. By helping the Children in the participation of life and love of God, through songs and prayers liturgy, retreats and so on, their upliftment and growth of their spiritual formation is ensured and guaranteed.

The Catholic women as a repository of faith are the power-house where the faith of family is generated, stored and distributed from. Okafor (1995) commenting on the spiritual life of the Catholic women, that they are the spiritual reference point. The Catholic mother is in the position remind the members of the family about church Feast Days, Holy Days of obligations and also to remind the family of the importance of attending masses on Sunday and keeping Sundays holy. They are the ones to prepare the children of the family for sacraments (pp. 140-144). They also advise women to cover the spiritual needs of their children when

their husbands are out for material needs of the family. This unfolds the magnanimity of the duty Catholic women as agent of change, because they are always there for the children.

The spiritual life of Catholic women is observable and witnessed by their children and the society at large through their faith and trust in God in trials, tribulations and turbulences in life. They are sustainable through their fervent prayers, fasting, church attendances devotion and active participation to pious societies. These Catholic women through these actions win souls (husbands, children, neighbours and society) for God. They are living examples to their children, portraits of godliness, true virtues and practical spirituality. The level of spirituality of Catholic women in Igboland is evidently regarded as faith in action. They are vividly embodiment of unfading confidence, hope and faith in God. Indeed, they are spiritual leaders that nurture others and help them to grow spiritually.

Catholic Women in Religions Duties

The Church is the body of Christ which comprises the men, women youth and children. Each category has specific functions to perform which is complementary (1 Cor, 12.) God is not discriminating in the service of his vineyard. Every Catholic woman answer God's clarion call to his service to the church and humanity.

Thus Chiegboka (2001) posits "they showed extra ordinary outstanding service in presence, structures and activities in the church. They are called to work, serve and labouring the Lord's vineyard" (p.30). Hence, Catholic Women are the joy and pride to the clergy, priest and mirror of the family and entire nation magnanimity of the duty Catholic women as agent of change, because they are always there for the children.

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Powerful Instrument of belief

In the religious lives of the Catholic women there are various powerful instruments strongly associated with these women. Notably amongst them are prayer, fasting, and faith. These are lifestyles which are veritable instrument of religious life. The Catholic women teach their children how to perform these instruments right from infancy. From cradle, their children watch them and as they grow, they begin to practice these acts. The Catholic women instruct their children that these are strong panacea to all squandering in their lives. The importance of these cannot be overemphasized.

As the children grow up, they become strong and unshakable Christians. Their relationships with God and man are strengthened as they are morally upright. To crown it all their level of spirituality will know no bounds.

Observance of Religious Beliefs

The Catholic women engage their children into observance of every religious obligation such as Christmas, Easter, Assumption of Virgin Mary, Ascension, All Saints, All souls and reception of the sacraments. They also engage their children into church activities like Catechism classes, Sunday Schools and participation in various organizations in the church such as Block Rosary, CYON, Legion of Mary, Altar Knights Association, MOD, Church Camping[^], and so on. They ensure and insist family evangelization as something crucial and obligatory. The Catholic women also in order to foster this apostolicity form themselves into groups to mention but a few Catholic women Organization, Catholic Widows Association, to achieve ultimate goals of evangelizing the world. Thus fulfilling the Code of Canon Law (No. 215) which stipulates that Christ's faithful may

freely establish associations which serve charitable or pious purposes or which foster Christian vocation in the world". Thus fulfilling the code of canon Law.

Consecrated Life

The Catholic women are so religious that some of them consecrate their lives to an acknowledged reality. There are wedded mothers, who apart from their primary duties in the family also dedicate their lives to the service of God. These are called the "Oblates". They serve dual functions of being mothers (wives) and religious oblates (married women of God). There are also the Reverend Sisters and Nuns, they live isolated lives in the monastery fasting and praying for the good of humanity and Nigeria.

The Catholic women also encourage their children to live simple lives, the Reverend Fathers, the Monks, Sisters, and Nuns. These various aspects of vocations carry out missionary works of evangelism and charity. Exceptionally the Monks and Nuns entirely devoted their lives to prayer.

The women religious solely have a special function to perform as code of canon law 1983, that the family of God, the Church have an intimate union with their spouse (Jesus Christ). Therefore, have to satisfy their spouse Jesus Christ. These was fully portrayed by F Larivieri (1977) as the role of women religious being to restore a sense of values as fundamental as love, work, justice and freedom (p.41). This is practically manifested in the essence of Jesus presence in the world. Jesus came into the world doing good, loving people, performing miracles, setting the captives free. Jesus enjoined the world to emulate and practicalize. These women in consonant are obedient and representative of their master Jesus Christ.

Manifestation of faithful devotion

The Catholic women assist the church in the work of evangelism. This is done in manifestation of whom and what they devote their lives to their "faith" they profess. The best evangelism is a person's life style. Oforaata (1995) asserts that "a good Christian mother should be an evangelical engineer, the hand that rocks the cradle and the neck that carries the head" (p.83). The Catholic Women win souls for Christ through their piety and good examples. The Vatican II expressed the awareness of our evangelical responsibility that the work of evangelism is the basic duty of the people of God and that they love to participate more widely in the various fields of church's apostolate. The document from the pastoral commission of the congregation of the Evangelization of people on the "Role of Women in Evangelization" Dans Le Cadre (cited by Chiegboka 2001) opines that:

Every Christian of whatever sex, age or situation is called to be an apostle. In virtue of their baptism, all Christians are not merely called and made capable of belief, they are also called to radiate and transmit (AG35). The apostolic role is basically equal for all but the motivation and the form it takes will vary according to the groups and individuals involved" (AG28). 10 (p.42).

Thus Chiegboka (2001) continues to say that "as lay faithful, women involvement in evangelism is a right and obligation" (p.41). In corroboration, Agboso (2006) avers the glaring fact that numbers of women are greater than that of men as such has already placed women on a higher demand for evangelism because the greater number of women evangelist, the more there will be higher number of convert. Therefore, the Catholic women are able to nurture and nourish the souls of families, neighbours and nation in general, they are in actuality sowing the seed of evangelism to all the ends of earth thereby ruling the world

Arbitration

The Catholic Women also play arbitration roles in times of conflicts. They perform this through empowering stable marriages among old and newly wedded couples. This is made possible through the invitation of seasoned resources persons like the clergy, priest, medical and paramedical staff, educationist and psychologist for marriage counseling from time to time. According to Ani (1989), "functional education implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows" (p.21). They organize lectures, symposiums and retreats especially on stability of marriage. The knowledge obtained thereafter helps them to develop new outlook and better perspective on how to plan their family without any hazards; thereby making their husbands grow in appreciation of their marital love and responsibility. During these occasions formal invitations are given to members who have divorce cases. By so doing, they are able to stabilize their homes through counseling. The women concerned learnt to do everything humanly possible to save their marriages as Nzomiwu (1995) states "a good Christian mother should therefore constantly endear herself to her husband and be prepared to sacrifice her personal comfort for the good and stability of her marriage" (p.22). In the community, other women (non-Christians) with similar case cases do seek counsel from them especially those with similar cases.

This kind gesture and "model" foster evangelism and conversion into Christianity amongst the beneficiaries (pagans). However, the Catholic Women extends their counseling roles to the clergy priest and other workers in the house of God. They offer fervent prayers and advice in their pastoral duties.

Conclusion

Catholic Women in Onitsha Archdiocese, Anambra State participate in funding religious activities and up keep of worship of God in their respective churches. In fact, the backbone of their churches. Their added advantage of having the greatest population of the church, makes them the life wire of the church during church activities. Like harvest and bazaar, without these women's effort, it's like life without blood because their efforts and activities prior and during the bazaar period are immeasurable. They grease the occasion with the provision of the most items for sales and the entire area made lively through their sales with spiritual songs. Likewise, during the mother's Sunday, there is high demand for goods and services in the economy. Through the efforts of these women, important dignitaries are drawn from far and near to honour these occasions who make various donations to the church, of which consequently leads to the development of Onitsha and its environments and Nigeria in diaspora.

The Catholic woman features prominently in the building of new churches both financially and human labour. They single handedly build halls and dedicate to the church. It is worthy to note that some of these halls are useful to the entire town where the churches are situated. They have erected building here and there for the propagation of the Christian faith. The Catholic Women Organization has major contributions towards the building of Chapel of Perpetual Adoration. There are also renovations of various offices in the church; indeed, these women's contribution is quite impressive and commendable.

However, the contributory aspect of the Catholic Women abound is being charitable. They take care of the needy, the poor and the helpless in accordance with religious demands. As a result of the affectionate and loving virtues of these Catholic Women, they pay visit to destitute homes, orphanages, hospitals and prisons. Adigwe (1980) avers that "the Parish Catholic Women Organization distributed gifts to the destitute, blinds lames, lepers in their camps and maternity home" (p. 121). This act equally extends to those who carry on missionary activities.

In sum, this paper has been able to establish the fact that women, especially the Catholic Women of Archdiocese, are seriously involved in the rebranding project in Nigeria. This is made manifest in the various ways in which they engage in social, religious, economic, political and psychological development of their immediate environment. It is believed that the call for rebranding of Nigeria is something that should concern not only the women folk, but all men and women of goodwill.

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