
Conference Paper

The Indispensable Role of Women in Family Education: The Centrality of Their Position in the Stages of Human Formation in Interreligious Dialogue in Africa

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Abstract: The Catholic Church has always proposed that “dialogue” is born from an attitude of respect for the other person, from a conviction that the other person is not just created in the image and likeness of God but more importantly because the other person has something good to say and to offer. In this context, the genius of women stands out as a positive asset in the family in passing societal values to humanity through family education because it is the duty of women to teach men to be human. Therefore, the aim of family education in interreligious dialogue is very important because its objective is to work together to build a communal future for the human race. John Paul II, popularly known as the saint for the family described the family as the way of the Church. For him, the family is the first and vital cell of the society, and also the cradle of faith. Hence, when one reflects on this deeply, the family becomes the most essential and most effective place where interreligious dialogue and its values can take its root. The family founded on love and life becomes the place where mutual dialogue begins. The individual is acknowledged as the other and each is grateful that each person is unique and is different from the other. Henceforth, this is where women, especially mothers have the greatest share of responsibility towards universal fraternity. Thus, the paper sets out to discuss the centrality of the role of women in family education and interreligious dialogue as interrelated because if mutual respect, peace and universal fraternity are to be achieved in interreligious dialogue, then women have an indispensable role in the family to make this attainable.

Keywords: Genius of Women, Inter-religious Dialogue, Family Education, Human Formation, Peace and Mutual Understanding

1. Introduction

Whatever is good, beautiful or true is ultimately rooted in the goodness, beauty and truth of God, who is the source of all beauty and truth. This rootedness in God provides the foundation for a Christian dialogue with peoples of all beliefs [1]. This must be understood clearly as rooted in love. It also demands, according to the bishops, thoughtfulness, faith based discernment, which aims to support and build upon what is most praise-worthy in the religious traditions of the other.

In appreciating the gratuitous gift of God in women to humanity, John Paul II affirms in *Muglieri Dignitatem*¹, that the Church “desires to give thanks to the most Holy Trinity for the ‘mystery of woman’ and for every woman; for all that constitutes the eternal measure of her feminine dignity, for the ‘great works of God,’ which throughout human history have been accomplished in and through her.” [2] Later, in his Letter to Women, he expressed thanks to all women, who are wives, mothers, daughters, those who are sisters, women who

¹ *Muglieris Dignitatem* was an encyclical written by John Paul II to affirm and to appreciate the dignity of women and their contributions not only in the Church but more especially in the world at large.

work for their various indispensable contributions to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling, to a model of life ever open to the sense of “mystery,” to the establishment of economic and political structures ever more worthy of humanity [3].

In the same vein, Pope Francis on the 10th of June, 2017 recognized and appreciated woman’s role in humanity. According to him, in today’s complex society, characterized by plurality and globalization, there is need for greater recognition of woman’s capacity to educate to universal fraternity. When women have the possibility to fully transmit their gifts to the entire community, the very way in which society is understood and is organized is positively transformed, coming to reflect better the essential unity of the human family [4].

Hence, in addressing this topic, this paper shall explain in simple terms the meaning and the importance of dialogue in family education taking into considerations the different types of dialogue as explained by the Vatican II². In advancing this formative step in the family, parents are the first teachers of their children. In African families particularly, the genius of women play a great role, either as sisters, mothers, and as wives. The role of women in family education becomes indispensable in passing on the values of interreligious dialogue to the children from the earliest days. The mothers as protector of life, and the closest to their children avail themselves of this singular honour and the various opportunities to transform their families. They are to take into consideration with great care the different stages of human formation. Their role cannot be fully explained without reference to some of the challenges face by these women in the families and in the society at large. This will help to suggest positive recommendations on how best to encourage women in advancing this singular responsibility without fear or intimidation but rather with great conviction, passion and love amidst the obstacles posed to them by the modern world.

This paper shall conclude by given few suggestions on how to help the growing family to cultivate the values of dialogue by taking into considerations the genius of women and their positive role in advancing these values in the society starting from the family.

In the context of this paper, women and mothers will be used interchangeably simply because every mother is first of all a woman with all the feminine characteristics endowed her by God and by nature. Even the women religious participate in this mission of education both as women and spiritual mothers depending on the context presented. Women who are not married also play an important role in African family as co-formators of the children. All women together form the responsible team of teachers in the family education and interreligious dialogue in an African family. Also, interfaith and interreligious dialogue will be used

interchangeably, but in the context of this paper the meaning remains the same.

2. The Concept of Interreligious Dialogue

According to Leonard Swidler, “the primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly” [5]. For him, interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project within each religious community and between religious communities. Because of the “corporate” nature of inter-religious dialogue, and since the primary goal of dialogue is that each partner learn and change himself or herself, he suggests that it is very necessary that each participant enter into dialogue not only with his or her partner across the faith line, but to share with them the fruits of the inter-religious dialogue. Only thus can the whole community eventually learn and change, moving toward an ever more perceptive insight into reality.

John Paul II on his part refers to dialogue thus: it is the fruit of Conciliar renewal. On the basis of this profound renewal, the Council opened itself to Christians of other denominations, to the followers of other religions, and to all people of our time. The terms inter-faith or inter-faith dialogue refer to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving a common ground in belief [6].

In this interfaith dialogue, women constitute at least fifty percent, and often more than that, of the adult members of their faith communities. It goes without saying (one would expect), that if for sociological as well as theological reasons interreligious dialogue is seen to be valuable and necessary, women can and must be involved in it, in all its forms and at all levels [7]. This is because women with their feminine characteristics have always been a big force to reckon with in any society, more so Christian women. That is the more reason why proper education of women all over the world is always clamored for by all well-meaning people [8]. Accordingly, the Christian women in particular come into this picture. Women generally have been proven to be very communicative; they can easily learn other languages faster than men. “Time and time again, studies have shown that generally, (there are always exceptions) men score higher in math’s tests and women score higher in language tests” [9].

According to Pope Francis, women connected intimately to the mystery of life, can do much to promote the spirit of fraternity, with their care for the preservation of life and with their conviction that love is the only force that can make the world habitable for all. He went further to explain that women often remain the only ones to accompany others, especially those who are weakest in the family and in society, the victims of conflicts and all those that must face the challenges of every day. He appreciated their contribution, especially in education to fraternity by its nature inclusive and generating of bonds which can overcome the culture of rejection [10].

2 Second Vatican Council is the 21st ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962-65), announced by Pope John XXIII on Jan. 25, 1959, as a means of spiritual renewal for the Church and as an occasion for Christians separated from Rome to join in search for reunion.

For Pope Francis, women are responsible for dialogue which means learning to build bonds of friendship and respect. Women are committed, often more than men, at the level of the “dialogue of life” in the inter-religious ambit, and thus they contribute to a better understanding of the challenges characteristic of a multi-cultural reality. However, women can also insert themselves with full right in exchange at the level of religious experience, as well as at the theological level. Many women are well prepared to address meetings of inter-religious dialogue at the highest levels and not only on the Catholic side. This means that women’s contribution is not limited to “feminine” arguments or to meetings among women alone. Dialogue is a path that woman and man must follow together. Today it is more necessary than ever for women to be present. This is because they are able to use their talents to achieve a lot in the homes and in the society. For Pope Francis, women possessing peculiar characteristics, can make an important contribution to dialogue with their capacity to listen, to receive and to open themselves generously to others. Pope Benedict XVI on the other hand encouraged women in the world to follow the example and the testimony of female saints: he says “our age has seen that (witness) of Mother Teresa of Calcutta: a humble daughter of Albania who became, by the grace of God, an example to the entire world in the exercise of charity and of service to human advancement.” [11].

Consequently, consecrated women of the Roman Catholic Church (women religious), who vowed to dedicate themselves to the service of God and human in the discharge of their duties have greater opportunities in various areas of their work to be involved in inter-religious dialogue. Since the women religious meet these people of other denominations in schools, hospitals, prisons, in rural areas and even in homes, there will be need for them to be prepared adequately for this special mission. This is why “the Church should enter into dialogue with the world in which she exists and labors. The Church has always something to say; the Church has a message to deliver; the Church has a communication to offer as mother. [12]. In this mission, the Church emphasizes the dialectic of this exercise of thought and of patience which will make us discover elements of truth also in the opinions of others. Importantly, all involved must search for the laws- of simplicity and clarity, for its power and authority, so as to overcome the natural lack of skill in the use of the great and mysterious spiritual instrument of speech. This will enable us to compete worthily with those who today exert so much influence through their words by having access to the organs of public opinion [13].

In this process of inter-religious dialogue, John Paul II called all Nigerians³ to fraternal respect, respect for family and united forces. He says:

...in the world today, there are many dangers which threaten the family that precious nucleus of society wherein

each human life begins and develops. I would assure you that Christians have a special concern for the family, for its unity, enrichment and protection. I speak on this concern with you because I am confident that you too are aware of the importance of the values of the family and wish to cooperate with Christians in efforts aimed at strengthening and supporting family life [14].

2.1. Different Forms of Dialogue

The Catholic Church in recent times has declared and encouraged that all Christians must remember that God has also manifested himself in some ways to the followers of other religious traditions. In exemplifying this, the Second Vatican Council has distinguished four forms of dialogue, these are: the dialogue of life, of action, of theological exchange and the dialogue of religious experience.

2.1.1. Dialogue of Life

This is an everyday event of members of various traditions where they encounter each other as neighbours, share their joys, sorrows, concerns, and seek constructive paths of understanding, cooperation, and exchange [15]. In this experience, Christians are called to relate with their neighbours in love and be open to learn and understand the religious customs and perspectives of them while sharing their own Christian faith and practice with them in an appropriate way. The spirit of openness guides the relationships here.

2.1.2. The Dialogue of Action

This focuses on action in society for the sake of social justice, development, and liberation. The different religions of the world must come together to fight the tragedy of the forces of division and work for what unites them together. They must learn to cooperate and learn from each other to respond to the worldwide crisis of violence, discrimination and war that tears humanity apart. Cardinal Arinze invited Christians and Buddhists alike to accept each other’s differences and work together for the elimination of suffering [16]. In this dialogue, persons of all religions must collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.

2.1.3. The Dialogue of Theological Exchange

This focuses on intellectual dimensions of religious traditions, comparing beliefs and visions, often in academic settings. This has always been a challenge especially in the interpretation of revealed truths. The knowledge of God is incomprehensible and transcending human understanding and control. Therefore, in using human language to explain the concepts of God can never capture the reality of God in his totality. Thus, according to Lefebvre, “the dialogue of theological exchange faces special challenges of interpretation”. The specialists in each religion must make adequate effort to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values [17].

3 Nigerians or Nigerian people are citizens of Nigeria or people with ancestry from Nigeria. This is Country in West Africa that is composed of multiple ethnic groups and cultures. Accordingly, the term Nigerian refers to a citizenship-based civic nationality.

2.1.4. The Dialogue of Religious Experience

This focuses on religious experience where practitioners of various traditions discuss the experiences of the spiritual life, including prayer and meditation. To support this argument, some of the intimate interreligious dialogues have taken place in an atmosphere of silence, meditation, and prayer. Pope John Paul II invited religious leaders from wide range of traditions to come to Assisi, Italy, in October 1986, to pray for world peace. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs and Hindus, representatives of traditional African and native American religions, Shintoists and Jains all participated [18]. The aim of this is to share the religious experience together which forms part of every human person, and to ascertain a common ground. This invitation on the part of the Catholic Church continues till date.

2.2. Prerequisite of Interfaith Dialogue

Generally, these are important values that each religion must pass on to the individual member so that each member is well grounded in his or her religion and values before he or she can be able to communicate and dialogue effectively with another person of a different faith religion. This will help us to understand what truly belongs to interfaith dialogue in the real sense of it.

2.2.1. Faith

This is the first and the most important value of interfaith dialogue. It is only out of the depth of involvement in the unending drama that began with Abraham that one can help the other towards an understanding of his or her situation. Interfaith must come out of the depth of mature persons. If it is not to lead to the confusion of the many, it must remain a prerogative of the few. This is faith in the Creator, to justice and mercy, a sense of contrition, sensitivity to the sanctity of life and to the involvement of God in history, the conviction that without the holy, the good will be defected, prays that history may not end before the end of days [19].

Thich Nhat Hanh supports this view by adding that: "for dialogue to be fruitful, we need to live deeply our own tradition and, at the same time, listen deeply to others. Through the practice of deep looking and deep listening, we become free, able to see the beauty and values in our own and others' traditions" [20]. When one understands his or her faith better, and can defend it clearly with passion, it will surely generate and develop into increased respect, consideration, and understanding for others. Though the prerequisite of interfaith dialogue is faith, the fruit of interfaith dialogue is that flourishing of life and community to which we are called by the God of all creation. This is the reason why faith realizes itself historically as acts of service and love. It is good works and liberating practice. And in liberation, salvation happens [21].

2.2.2. Communication and Separation

These two are very important for us to preserve our individuality as well as foster care for one another. This will lead to reverence, respect, understanding and cooperation. An

example could be illustrated this way: a Christian ought to realize that a world without the people of Israel will be a world without the God of Israel. A Jew on the other hand, ought to acknowledge the eminent role and part of Christianity in God's design for the redemption of all humanity. But in essence, while dogmas and forms of worship are divergent, God is the same [22].

2.2.3. Justice

This is one of the fundamental human aspirations. This means the kind of love that seeks effectively to humanize, to give life in abundance to the poor and the oppressed of the human race. It creates a primary stage of ensuring security for the poor. The concrete manifestation of love takes the form of service in ensuring primarily the safety and care for the poor and gradually extending service for the fullness of life [23]. In relation with interfaith dialogue, justice is not the absence of war between persons of different faith, but the ability to guarantee the safety of the individual in their different positions as they come to dialogue among themselves. Absence of the safety of the individual will surely lead to fears and insecurity. Having discussed the important values of interfaith dialogue, the family is presented in this paper as the place where these values must be taught to the individual, especially from childhood.

2.3. The Family

The family is the place where values of dialogue are encountered and cultivated. The word family has been understood by various people and with different interpretations. There is no definition of the family under international human rights law. But, the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen March, 1995, recognized the importance of the family as the basic unit of society and acknowledged that it plays a key role in social development and as such, should be strengthened, with attention to the rights, capacities and responsibilities of its members. The family is where we get the first and most important glimpse of the character and quality of God's love that molds other value in life.

Surprisingly, one of the focal point on the family works is to engage in dialogue with Governments, UN agencies, civil society, the private sector and academics, facilitating the exchange of good practices in family policy making [24]. Their main aim was to build an awareness of the global situation of families and promotes family oriented policies and programme. A good analysis of these objectives shows the importance of the family in achieving any goal in the society. Dialogue as presented in this document is geared towards many people and different orientations but nothing is mentioned of dialogue among different religions. The neglects of these have caused many nations instability, confusion, and disagreements which eventually have led many to wars. There is need to address this phenomenon that infringes into society, divides the families from time to time.

Teasdale, reflecting on polarization and the clash of civilization currently between Islam and modernity has this

to say:

the need for dialogue, genuine in-depth communication, should be evident among the nations-states, economic blocs, and disparate cultures as well as among the great religions themselves, especially Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, and the important indigenous traditions, the Native American, African tribal, shamanistic cultures, and aboriginal faiths [25].

According to him, these different traditions have a lot of concerns in common, such as the environment, war, and peace, terrorism, disease, hunger, poverty, education, economic development, the rights of women and children, human rights, the use of resources, bioethical questions, and justice. Hence, there is urgent need for the religions to converse with one another in this fast-paced, and quickly emerging global culture [26].

Amidst this confusion, dialogue becomes an indispensable activity of humanity because it requires the society to face issues that divide, or could divide the human family. Furthermore, dialogue has a central place in relations among the religions. The reason is that as much as people of different world's religions are meeting one another everywhere, in schools, organizations, the military, airports, theaters, shopping malls, at work and in sporting events, there is need to accept the other in all its manifestations, especially in the sphere of religious diversity. Hence, the family becomes the cell of the society where the value of the other person is first appreciated and therefore, becomes *modus vivendi* for a happy living with others. The family is a unique type of human community whose members are connected to one another by blood-ties, unlike all other societies. In a family, new members will always originate from within the family itself by way of procreation and therefore, they are linked to one another by a constant and invariable pattern of mutual relations [27].

Africans on the other hand, have a profound religious sense, a sense of the Sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of spiritual world.... "In African culture and tradition, the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental" [28]. Many Africans opine that the family is the fundamental human community, from which all other communities originate. Although there are various social definitions of the family, the Catholic Church holds very dear the vocation to family life and in particular to married life, which involves parents and children [29]. Vatican II highlights that, "... marriage is an Institution confirmed by the divine law and receiving its stability, even in the eyes of the society, from the human act by which the partners mutually surrender themselves to each other, for the good of the partners, of the children, and of the society" [30]. This sacred bond no longer depends on the human decision alone.

God has made "*the family*" the basic educational institution. The most important place of Christian/faith formation is the home. In our time there has been a serious decline in the holiness of married life, this is because we have not allowed religious ideals to influence family affairs sufficiently. As a result Christian family education has been

greatly weakened. Yet, the role and the significance of the family in the society cannot be over emphasized. Conceding this significance of the family, John Paul II articulates that the family is the sanctuary of life and love. Loving the family simply means being able to appreciate the values and capabilities, fostering them always. Again, loving the family means endeavoring to create for it an environment favorable for its development [31]. The way the family operates, so does the society. Hence, if the family is stable, strong, loving and healthy then the nation will have all these attributes as well. Thus, the importance of family education cannot be neglected. Education into these values will surely stabilize the family and the society at large. African values that elevate the family, the community, and human life in general require people to be sensitive to the needs of others, especially the underprivileged, to assure harmony and progress in the extended family [32].

3. The Genius of Women: A Gift to Humanity

The genius of someone is the extraordinary, intellectual, capacity and exceptional ability and the creative power that makes the person shine out in virtues. The genius of a woman in this scenario is that power and the extraordinary intellect and talent of a woman. Pope Francis affirms with all passion that "there are so, so many women that, in the tasks carried out daily, with dedication and conscientiousness, with courage, at times heroic, have put to fruit their genius, their precious traits in the most varied, specific and qualified competencies" [33].

The order of love according to John Paul II constitutes woman's own vocation, and the moral and spiritual strength is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way [34]. So, with responsibility and love, a wife who is also a mother has the vocation of entrustment of the human-being and the first recipients of this entrustment are her spouse and her children. As a matter of fact, the true genius of women is the genius for being human, and for being loving. In other words, it is the genius of humanity, the ability to love others more than one loves oneself, and love, humanity, is the supreme form of intelligence [35].

It is the function of women to teach men from the moment of birth how to be human. We all know that it is in the home that the foundations of the kind of world in which we live are laid, and in this sense it will always remain true that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world. The hand is always the hand of woman [36]. This implies that women must assume the task of edging persons who will know how to participate in the process of making a world fit for human beings to live in. The greatest single step forward in that direction will be made when women consciously assume the task of teaching their children to be, like themselves, loving and cooperative.

Parenting is a shared task but the woman has the most

demanding part. It is the woman who pays directly for this shared generation, which literally absorbs the energies of her body and soul, says John Paul II. And there can be no program of equal rights if the man does not acknowledge that fact [37]. When the woman is deprived of the opportunity to give herself to the child she cannot fulfill herself. All in the family are impoverished, the child who is deprived of the mother's loving care, the woman herself, and the husband who becomes the object of resentment as so many women [38].

One cannot negate the fact that in our materialistic age, because we place less value on the qualities for being human than we have for accomplishment in the arts, sciences, and technologies, our values have become confused, undeveloped, and we have almost forgotten the true qualities of love. For this singular honour given to women, wives and mothers no doubt, have been entrusted with the responsibility to proclaim the sanctity of human life from conception until natural death by counteracting the increasing acceptance within some societies that the developing embryo/fetus can be destroyed with impunity. This is why in a spirit of charity, they always advocate for the lives of the unborn, encourage the use of natural family planning, and assist the vulnerable spiritually and materially. Mothers in love and affection guide and nurture each child's unique spiritual, affective, cognitive, psychological, social and cultural development throughout the changing situations that come with each stage of the family life cycle. Generally, mothers are the ones that stay closer to their children than the fathers in the course of their formative process. Brendan Finlayson has this to say:

By precept and example a mother, assisted by her spouse, transmits Christian virtues, family history and traditions, and creates 'self-identity and purpose' for her offspring. She provides formal and informal education within the home educating and training the next generation of parents, for values, attitudes and modes of behaviour are both 'taught and caught'. She also clearly appreciates the paradox that the more she gives love away, the more her store of it increases. She becomes God's own smile on the new-born child [39]

This is the reason why every woman needs to be aware of her mission in the world. She must be able to identify the various fields of life wherever she finds herself. A woman's role as a mother gives her special openness to the new person and to other persons. In this openness, she discovers herself through a sincere gift of self [40]. According to Josephine Robinson, "women and men are equal in God's love; that women generally, have qualities that can be sanctified in whatever state of life they live; and that the gifts and responsibilities of motherhood, physical or spiritual are the universal privilege of all women, whatever their status" [41].

4. The Indispensable Role of Women in Family Education

Generally, the woman in marriage or in the family plays three different important roles, as a woman, wife and mother.

Growing up as *Yoruba* lady in a very rich culture where women are regarded as special gifts has taught me to have great regard for them because of their irreplaceable role in the family and in the society. *Yoruba* women, past and present, believe that it is honorable to be a mother, only women can be mothers. Obirin (women) as rightly called among the *Yoruba* are regarded as unique beings because of their special nature. According to Ilesanmi's research on *Ifa*⁴, "*Ifa* speaks positively about women only if the women saved him from negative forces" [42]. The role of women is always in saving and protecting lives.

As adult, the woman is expected to have a stable character that portrays such feminine characteristics as gentleness, kindness, cleanliness, decency, and homely. She is supposed to be responsible and as such should be able to cook, take care, and clean the house to make it neat [43]. Though different communities' have different roles for their women, in Nigeria for example women are responsible for the home and they should be supportive to the men by being accountable and hardworking. This is why a typical Nigerian woman is positively aggressive about life because she knows her worth cannot be taken for granted in the society. Hence, she is not lazy at all but affirmative in all her dealings with life.

Motherhood is considered a position of power. Among the *Yoruba* in Nigeria, *Iya* (mother) is regarded as the second to the gods. Mothers are actually referred to as goddess themselves. Their role goes beyond that. Giving birth to children is just the begging of motherhood among the *Yoruba*, feeding, caring, educating and culturing the child are as important as delivering the baby. They see all men and women as their children whom they conceived for nine months, breast fed for not less than fifteen months and guided until they attained maturity [44]. Most women are aware of this mission, the reason why they are very careful in exercising their powers. This is because of the power given to them by God and by nature to either build or destroy is known to them. You cannot underestimate the power of a mother. Women's motherhood is understood in the path of the fruit of the marriage union of a man and a woman, of that biblical knowledge which corresponds to the "union of the two in one flesh" [45].

This is related to the birth and nurturing of children and the care of the home in a particular sense as a unique responsibility of a mother. The greatest duty of a mother is to give life and nurture it to the fullest. For this singular honor and role, Pope Francis at a general audience in Rome has encouraged women attending ceremony in the Sistine Chapel to feel free to breastfeed their children in the Church. Mothers should avoid delegating their duties to other helpers like relatives, nannies and hired hands [46]. As their responsibility, mothers have the right to pass on to their children important educational values as enumerated above

4. Wande Abimbola who is the first African Scholar of *Ifa* acknowledges that *Ifa* is repository of *Yoruba* Philosophy. The *Yoruba* believe in deities and other supernatural forces. Traditionally, the followers of *Ifa* believe in *Olodumare* or *Olorun* as the Supreme, self-existing deity.

which are vital for their formation. These duties are not peculiar to any religion. They are universal to all women, especially in relation to the building of the society where the values of interreligious dialogue can take place. This is the brain behind the (KCCB) in formulating a national family life programme as a policy document to enhance the building up of the family.

The vocation of being a wife flows from that of being a woman too. The duties of the wife are outlined in the Bible as follows: submission to the husband (Eph 5:22) and in the context of this seminar paper, she is to be sober and faithful to her husband (1 Tim 3: 11). Again, she is to care for the family and the home (Prov 31:27). She is to be loyal to her husband and support him in all things. Once she is faithful to these duties, she sets the pace for her children to emulate her as the model of virtues. In evaluating the centrality of women's position within the stages of growth and human formation in interreligious dialogue, it is essential to discuss the areas of initial formation to adulthood in the child's developmental growth.

Faith formation is very important in the life of every human person; and this must start early enough in the different homes. This is very essential from the ages of 1-6⁵. The Parents must strive to be holy as to show the children the importance of holiness of life by avoiding all wrong doings at all times [47]. The mother who nurtures the child becomes very important in handing over to the child the sense of the sacred and the dignity of the human person as she journeys with the child.

Family catechetical activity has special character which is irreplaceable in the homes. Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis [48]. Parents should be to their children what we may call a first *picture of God, a "kind of transparency of his presence"*. In the ideal home, their love, generosity, kindness, piety, and humility coupled with a true Christian dignity will leave indelible marks on the developing personalities of their children and will form stepping-stones to God [49]. Education in the faith by Christian parents should begin from the children's tender age. They must strive and grow in faith through the witness without words but which preserves in the children the faith according to the Gospel [49].

The mothers are always with the children, and their influence, if properly used, will outweigh undesirable external influences and safe guard the future of the children especially in moment of bad influence from peer group. They must provide an atmosphere at home especially where love, peace, security, trust and respect are at work. This environment will convey the sense of God. But the decisive factor is the living faith of the Father and Mother. Even before the child can understand words, reverent use of tone and signs leave impressions. When this is lacking at this initial stage, the mother is blamed for neglect of her primary role.

The dignity of the human person must be taught to them from the moment they understand what is right and wrong. What the mother does is seen by the children. A child who watches the mother molest and maltreat a housemaid goes to school to do exactly the same. The values of respect, mutual understanding, and generosity are passed on to next generation through supportive conversation (Deut. 7). The parents need to be on the alert for moments when the child will benefit from a remark, or will be ready to listen to suitable story especially from the mother. Discretion and tact are indispensable.

Religious education in schools⁶ follow this initial stage. What they are taught in schools must be in conformity with the values they have learnt from home. The core values of interreligious dialogue must be taught to them in schools. It has been proven that more women are teachers than men. There are so many women that, in the tasks carried out daily especially in schools, with dedication and conscientiousness, with courage at times heroic, have put to fruit their genius, their precious traits in the most varied, specific and qualified competencies united to the real experience of being mothers and co-formators [50]. In Catholic Schools, the women religious are a great weapon to this integral education.

Another crucial step in human formation is paying attention to the adolescence or the youth⁷ that is growing. Systematic parish education/catechesis for the preparation for matrimony and formation for adult life must be done in an organized way. The Catholic Church talks about pastoral care of the family. This family education precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of education. The growing adult here is assisted to discover, evaluate and activate what he or she has received by nature and grace, both in the Christian community and by living in human society. The mother as a gentle guardian helps the growing adult to achieve these goals gradually.

Youth formation in chastity, human love, dignity of labour, orderliness, truthfulness, faithfulness to the commandments of God and the laws of the society, responsibility and respect of human life from conception to natural death must be taught as they grow to adulthood gradually.⁸ Formation in human sexuality within the context of the family moral living is very essential as well. They should be taught who they are and the implication of their sexes as male or female. They should be educated as adults so they can follow their vocation to life with a mature sense of responsibility and be able to choose their state of life without fear or anxiety. Father Jungmann says to catechists that "to dispense with the third stage of training would be tantamount building a house without a roof" [51]. The women as mothers in this stage have a great responsibility towards their children. They must find time to discuss topics that affect the children for example, problems that confront them in their places of work and professions, sex and family difficulties, faith and science.

5 This initial formation is well expressed in the Gospel readings especially in John 1:12, Matt 19:14, 2 Tim 3:15.

6 Religious Education in schools from 6-12years. The aim is to have a follow up of initial education from the family.

7 Adolescence/Youth is from 12years above.

8 Cf. 1 Samuel 2:26, Matt 19:16-22, 1 Cor 7:3.

The youth must see that the parents are disciplined and responsible so that they can discuss with them the issues that bothers them. Importantly, the witness of society values given by parents in the family will come to children with tenderness and parental respect. In a situation where the society, or the media fail to communicate values as expected, the parents and in particular the mothers should help the young people to face life challenges with courage and creativity because of numerous emotional and social conflicts associated with this period of life.

Furthermore, is to educate to fraternity. Women, in as much as they are educators, have a particular vocation, capable of having new ways of acceptance and mutual esteem be born and grow. The feminine figure has always been at the center of family education, thus, it must not be neglected either by the women themselves or by the society. Women's contribution in the field of education is inestimable. Education entails richness of implications be it for the woman herself, given her way of being, be it for her relations, given her stance on issues of human life and of life in general. Whenever the women neglect to perform this God given responsibilities, the family suffers. When women train their children well in acquiring the values mentioned above, the young male or female will gradually graduate to adulthood with convictions and trust because he or she realizes the good life of his or her parents have sustained him or her thus far.

The movement to adulthood⁹ is the next stage for the young person. The individual takes personal responsibility for his or her beliefs and feelings. There is need for continuous personal development in human formation. As one is able to reflect on one's own beliefs there is openness to a new complexity of faith, but this also increases the awareness of conflicts in one's belief. Those who have developed their faith are able to live out their faith in their daily lives especially when relating with other faith religions. As this time, to practice their beliefs becomes a second nature to them. They are enlightened to treat any person with compassion, love and respect as he or she views people from a universal community, and should be treated with the universal principles of love and justice.

Some of the challenges to family education and interreligious dialogue that must be avoided are: unavailability of mothers to children to impart values, the influence of housemaids on children, the search for greener pastures in urban cities, the marginalization of women in an African society, absence of proper curriculum on interreligious dialogue in schools, lack of adequate education on the values of interreligious dialogue in the family, the effect of social media especially the effect of pornographic films and the effect of peer group in schools among young people.

5. Conclusion

This paper has expressed in details the need for adequate

understanding of dialogue and the indispensable role of women as mothers, wives, and religious women in family education to impart the right values. The central issue discussed is the fact that education to religious values on interreligious dialogue need to start from the family. The children take and emulate fast what they see the adults doing. The women stand out in this mission.

These values have been spelled out clearly in the course of this paper. The most important concern is to keep encouraging women in all fields of life to stand up to their responsibilities by taking seriously their genius in the society beginning from the family. Amidst the various challenges faced by women, they must not neglect their primary aim of building up the family because a stable family produces a stable society.

Furthermore, in order to promote good mutual relations, the various religions must learn to look into respective faith resources for those injunctions that promote and encourage good attitudes towards others not of the same faith. This paper wishes to support Cardinal Onaiyekan's concept, he argues strongly that "toleration is not enough, it is necessary also to accept and respect the other. It is only in doing this, that peace and tolerance will reign among interfaith religions" [52]. This must begin from the various families of Christians, Muslims, Jews, and African Traditional Religion, or any other religion. Women must be allowed to assume their proper place in the education of their children in these values being suppressed and intimidated.

The importance of interfaith cooperation and dialogue especially among religious leaders must continue, so that men and women of whatever faith can see one another as citizens of the same nation with common challenges and objectives, as well as the same broad spiritual values and moral directives for life. The education to this achievement is the basic for achieving this objective and women as teachers and formators to human values are the best models on this enterprise. This is the clarion call for the families of all religions and interreligious dialogue. A neglect of this fact is a failure for peace and justice among different faith religions. In view of all these this paper wishes to make some recommendations¹⁰:

In the traditional African societies, though the man is the head of the family, women are more industrious than men. This has certainly accelerated the equalization of the sexes in our time. It is also noted that African women in the modern working situations, many times, outdo men. They are strong, mature, and many of them are of formidable character. One recalls with gratitude and admiration: Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (President of Liberia till date), Baleka Mbete (former South Africa's National Assembly Speaker and Vice President), Luisa Diogod Asha-Rose Migiro (first woman Prime Minister of Mozambique), Bisi Adeleye Fayemi (a Co-founder and Executive Director of Africa Women Development Fund),

9 Adulthood is another crucial stage this is from 30years above.

10 These are some recommendations suggested are to help the individual family identify the values that will enhance happiness and trust among couples and their children.

Evelyn Oputo (Manager and Director of Nigeria's Bank of Industry) and Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti (the first woman front line political activist in Nigeria) [53]. This is why Pope Benedict acknowledges that women in Africa make a great contribution to the family, the society and to the Church by their many talents and unique gifts [54]. Therefore, the society must encourage them to be their best in the family education. Failure to allow them will result in a society devoid of values.

When women with their genius achieved positive goals in the family, then interreligious dialogue is achievable in the society. Children from good homes will love, respect and celebrate others from other religions without discrimination.¹¹ During the last celebration of Muslims brethren, it was reported that Indonesian Catholics made greater effort to help Muslims celebrate *Eid ad-Fitr* this year amid heightened religious tensions in the Country [55]. The Catholic Archbishop Ignatius Suharyo issued a video message to the country's Muslim brothers and sisters to mark the end of Ramadan. Women must continue to assume their responsibilities in the family and in the society. These Catholics have been trained by their fathers and mothers to celebrate the other irrespective of their different religions from homes. The media has an important role to play in this regards as what kind of messages do they propagate? Are they good, or evil messages that will move for interfaith dialogue? What people see and read speak more to their minds and their hearts. Therefore, mothers in homes must evaluate what information gets to the children. Pornography or any forms of immoral programmes and violent films must be avoided.

Interfaith dialogue from conversion to conversation is advisable. This implies that people must work for reconciliation through conflict resolution. If anyone wishes to criticize for example, it must not aim to humiliate the offender. If there is need to criticize the perpetrator, it must not aim at humiliating the person, rather it should aim at pointing out the evil involved. This must begin from the family so that the children can emulate these values. Mothers must present to their children other religions as good and noble irrespective of their family religion.

Religious harmony in all the different religious communities is to be encouraged and celebrated. This simply means they need to accept that there is another force beyond the reach of our ordinary senses. Hence, all the different faith religions, despite their philosophical differences, have a similar objective: invest in the family education of the children. Let women, especially mothers assume their proper responsibilities by putting emphasis on human improvement, human dignity, love, mutual respect for others, justice and sharing other peoples' suffering. In this vein, every religion has more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal to accomplish. To invest in this mission is to make the world a better place for everyone.

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¹¹ This is what is referred to as "Responsible Motherhood".

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