REVIEW ARTICLE

Retrieval of Moral Values in promoting African Christian Families: A Perspective from Amoris Laetitia

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Abstract

Threats to the Christian moral values in families today is enormous than ever. Materialism, secularism, negative media influences just to mention a few have weakened and destroyed many Christian families. Contemporary society and families focus more on how to attain wealth without considering moral implications. Lack of love is demonstrated through people who have become less empathetic and less concerned for others. In the age of secularism society is becoming less religious and in families parents do not take their responsibility of raising children according to Christian values. The situation is worsened by the negative media influences that convey ungodly attitudes and values to society and families. TV shows, movies, songs, video games, websites and magazines all are threat to Christian family moral values in Africa. In such situation violence is acceptable and disciplining children who disobey their parents is taken as violation of children rights. The paper intends to rediscover the ancient Christian family moral values that helped and sustained the Church and families despite many challenges. It focuses on what the African Christian families have, what they can learn from ancient Christian teachings as bishop Kallistos of Diokleia puts it, "Perfect love is always crucified love" It entails to remain morally stable and relevant to the present age of technology and innovations. Couples in marriage bond are called to continually repent and seek for forgiveness. The paper highlights how family togetherness, prayers, talking about media and encouraging entertainments that promote good values could be used as a channel to transform the Christian families. It explains how true and genuine love, care, respect, tolerance, forgiveness could be adopted as a new way of life to protect the Christian marriages and sustain family life. The paper underlines Christian family moral values from Amoris Letitiea perspective, looking at the role of parents, showing commitment to love, mercy and forgiveness. Christian community has a role to play when it comes to families, how to tackle cultural changes in all aspects which include individualism, loneliness and many others that lead to moral decay in Christian families. The paper will end with conclusion and recommendations.

1. Introduction

Much has been said and written about marriage, families and Christian moral values from ancient time to the present era. But the most important reality is to know that love is the heart of Christian marriage and family vocations, it is the joy of family and of the Church (Amoris Laetitia, no. 1) and society. Despite many challenges in families, Christian married couples try to remain in this joy of love fulfilling their calling as per the Gospel teachings (Amoris Letitia, no. 57). In the marriage union the couples are able to nurture moral values in their families as one of the fundamental technique of developing one's moral values and humaneness in this globalised world. It is expected that moral nurturing of children in our time will help them to bring light in the darkness of the present world where the breaking of trust, a decline in empathy and compassion, a disregard for honesty and integrity and lack of accountability remains a big challenge. Tripathi (2014: 22) defines values as

"the evaluative standards we use for deciding what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, what is desirable and what is undesirable". It implies that the value of a thing or object is worthy and treasured, so promoting moral values in Africa is promoting goodness in humanity.

Values permeate all aspects of human life, for instance, we talk of family values, religious values, social values, political values, cultural values, moral values and personal values. Parents help their children to develop personal moral values which demonstrate in their conviction in what they believe. Nevertheless people continue to learn in diverse ways as they continue to relate to others up to the end of their lives. Christian families in Africa are expected to be guided by the Christian values, cultural values, traditional customs, the scripture and the teachings of Church fathers. Living a positive moral life is a way to influence children and youth to continue this tradition and hand it to the next generations to develop individual ethical values. Christian couples are trained to constantly avoid elements that weaken love and moral values in their families. This paper underscores family moral life in the pre-Christian era, explains family and African moral life, and discusses Perspectives of Amoris Laetitia in relation to African Christian family moral values. Challenges of practicing genuine love in African Christian families will also be discussed, finally conclusion and recommendations.

2. Families and Moral values in Pre-Christian World

A family is the most natural, fundamental social entity especially relating to the union of man and woman through marriage and their offspring or parents and their children (Morris, 1969: 474). One of the function of the family is to help the society be stable, organization and regulation of sexual behavior in a way legitimized by reproduction, the care of children until they are capable of caring for themselves, the socialization of children to develop good behavior, values and attitudes expected by the society, the organization of division of labour, child rearing plus provision of their emotional security (Betrao, 1990).

Life and relationships start in the family where an individual learns basic rules, norms and society morals. Morality is from Latin word "*Moralitas*" meaning, manner, character, ethos and proper behavior. It implies the code of conduct by which human beings regulate their lives (New World Encyclopedia, 2018). It is a code of conduct put forward by a group or society and

accepted by members of that group or society (Gert, 2016). In this context, moral values are the basis for which human beings make right or wrong decisions which can shape or ruin the individual's personality. According to (Zallin, 2009) ethics in ancient Chinese society had its source in the family which connected one to different people and enabled him/her to express love between family members and beyond. So the cultivation of love starts from the family where people are taught to live with others harmoniously, be obedient, respect others and practice compassion.

Moral values are first developed in the family which is the basis of love, sense of appreciation and individual moral code. They can also develop within one self as one gains experience from various sources in life including evidences from witnesses, reading and learning from different writers (Bourg, 2016). Moreover, families are crucial in helping to plant the seeds of success in one's life through early formation of moral values. Ashcroft, (2023) comments that "In the Buddha's *Samyutta Nikaya* he states that parents play the most important role in their child's physical, mental, and spiritual development. Parents teach their children how to eat, speak, walk, and provide them with moral guidance".

Good life in ancient world was the result of moral values developed in families. In ancient times people learned how to be good through many ways including storytelling, poems, proverbs and role models just to mention a few. In relation to that Rosenstand, (2005: 40) states:

> In ancient times the storytellers were the primary teachers of morals. …parents have always had a hand in moral education, but in pretechnological cultures ….those who knew the legends were the ones who, in effect, represented the social institutions of religion, school and government. The myths surrounding the origin of the world, of society, of food items, of love and death and the stories of important men and women in the tribe's past provided rules for the tribe to live by-moral structures that could be used in everyday life to make decisions about crops, marriages, warfare…The way to teach children how to become good members of the tribe was to tell the old stories.

Stories with lessons may be fiction, facts or both but children not only enjoyed listening to them, but also those stories shaped their ethical lives. In Egypt between 2345 BCE and 2333 BCE during the sixth dynasty people lived through family moral guidance.

Knowledge and understanding were important, and it meant to know right and wrong, so a child formation was incomplete if he / she lacked this moral knowledge and wisdom. It implies that the process of moral growth was a learning process in which parents and teachers exemplified moral precepts (Lichtheim, 1997:1). This is related to Plato's teachings that, those that preserve harmonious condition, just and good action result from knowledge and wisdom, while those that impairs the same condition are from unjust actions and ignorance (Denise, Peter Freund &White 2004:13-14). The thinking person was supposed to work out in daily life, to maintain good character, and remain a good model to the younger generations.

On one hand, people believed that suffering was the consequence of any wrong action committed. While on the other hand, right doing brought success and happiness in the family and society. Evil doing was bound to bring failure; disaster or calamity hence people were encouraged to act in a right manner in order to bring blessings in families, villages, towns, and the nation as a whole. This is because gods were seen as the ultimate judges of people's moral actions (Lichtheim, 1997).

In the same perspective, a Psalmist states "Happy those who do not follow the counsel of the wicked … they are like a tree planted near streams of water… But not the wicked, they are like chaff driven by the wind..." (1:1-6). It entails that majority of the pre-Christian communities' discouraged evil doing. The undesirable moral conduct and attitudes were discouraged in ancient Israelite families and society. This is because one of the overarching goals of the Torah was to refine people's moral character. Sin was reason for destructive events or misfortunes. The idea of sin is connected with the root to miss, or failure, evil as ethical wrong and rebellion which lead to trouble in life (Breyfogle, 1912: 542-543). On the same note, Plato said "…. that man's ultimate happiness consists in wisdom, based on the consideration of divine things…" (Denise, et al. pg. 91).

Children were to get this profound moral knowledge from parents so as to help them develop their potentials as moral men and women in society. In addition, the Egyptians learned *Maat*, a sense of underlying righteousness in all things from their families. This helped them to anchor the understanding of right and wrong actions. They were guided by wisdom, which was considered the greatest virtue, recognizing the brotherhood of mankind as a clear example of moral evolution in action. This was demonstrated in the

private tomb inscriptions "I never did any evil thing against anyone" Another tomb was written "… I spoke truly…I did right…I spoke well…I pleaded the good…I grasped what was best…for I wanted the good for people" To show the seriousness in observing moral life one king said "… I judged not one innocent by another's charge. I answered evil with good and did not seek evil" (Lichtheim, pg. 9, 12, 17). In a similar perspective ancient Chinese believed that there was no regret in the death of one who had good life (Zallin, Z, 2009).

Good character like doing justice to others is remembered even after death, but no one remembered evil deeds. Good is a moral voice linked to moral values in ancient world, in Israel, the word good is used as a value judgment. This is from the account of creation (Genesis 1:1-31) "…and God saw that it was good…" in this case, the language of morality is explicitly 'good'. It is a moral dimension of existence, therefore, goodness is not something we invent; it is part of the text through the ear of faith. In the Bible those who failed to live up to the challenges of the word 'good' e.g. Adam and Eve, Cain and people in the story of Noah raise a moral concern (Sacks, 2019).

Similarly, Zoroaster (618-541 B.C.E) the ancient prophet of Iran taught that "man is free to choose his cause of action, and that the wise will choose that which is consonant with truth, light, and order, that which will identify him with the forces of good, and assist their triumph over the forces of evil. Man's part in the cosmic struggle, therefore, is to think good thoughts, speak good words, and perform good actions" (Ling, 1991: 75, 81). However, this can happen if the heart is trained since it absorbs lessons. Those who refuse to learn are taken as fools because they act evilly, hence bound to fail (Ling, Ibid).

Greek philosophy reveals how people went through fear in ancient times because of the punishment by gods in case of immoral behaviors. People were expected to be righteous, respect others and treat them well. Moral life was determined by actions of justice to others as demonstrated by one of the philosopher.

> "Euthyphro is taking his own father to court for murder, and though ordinary Greek morality would condemn such an action as impiety, Euthyphro defends it on the basis that the gods behave in the same sort of way, according to the traditional stories. Socrates makes it clear that he does not believe these stories, because they attribute immorality to the gods. This does

not mean, however, that he does not believe in the gods. He was observant in his religious practices, and he objects to the charge of not believing in the city's gods that was one of the bases of the prosecution at his own trial. He points to the spirit who gives him commands about what not to do…(J. Hare, 2006).

Acting unwisely leads to failure in life or sickness like Miriam's leprosy "Please do not charge us with the sin that we have foolishly committed. Let her not thus be like the stillborn babe that comes forth from its mother's womb, with its flesh half consumed…" (Numbers, 12: 11-15). Miriam was full of jealousy; she spoke against Moses and acted unwisely, hence was punished. So, being wise entails practicing justice, benevolence and generosity, the virtues learned from childhood. Another interpretation reveals that Miriam and Aron were racists that is why they objected the idea of Moses having the Cushite woman, she was black, hence raises a moral issue (William, 2002: 265). However, (Adamo 1986; 2014:500-530;2018:1-9) does not agree with this view because according to him, there is no prejudice against black people throughout the scripture. The stories in the scripture never show discrimination against black Africans unlike in the modern time where racial discrimination is openly demonstrated.

Observation from Judaism shows that, Jewish value of "*giddul banim*" (child-rearing) is based on the development of the child as a living vehicle for the continuation of the Biblical heritage. Since the child is "not a thinker and is unable to distinguish good from evil, "the parent has the ultimate responsibility of guiding the child as shown in Proverbs (1:8) "Listen my son to the instruction of your father, and forsake not the teachings of your mother" (Bekerman, 2005). Furthermore, in Talmud it is stated that "Better are the late fruits we ate in our childhood than the peaches we ate in our old age." (J-m Talmud, Pe'ah 87:4). In this context, the family is crucial in ensuring that a child gets health, mental, spiritual, moral and psychological formation. In ancient Israel development of an individual was the result of learning beginning from families (Bekerman, 2005). Families enabled people to gain wisdom leading to righteous living.

Unequivocally, in ancient India people believed that immoral conduct was a serious hindrance to the realization of Brahman, that is, "the ultimate reality underlying all phenomenon in the Hindu scriptures" To be morally good entails the ability to make decision and differentiate actions between those that are good (or right) and those that are bad (or wrong). This is important in the development of personality that can avoid violence, envy and stealing. According to this understanding moral upright people are able to practice hospitality, compassion, generosity and self-control. This way of upbringing of children is morally healthy. So, inculcating moral values to children from parents, teachers, role models, peers, colleagues and wider society was crucial among the ancient Hindu society (Chhitij, Vishal, Anupan &Srivastiva, 2013).

Buddha (563 B.C.E) taught that Moral conduct has its essence from five receipts which includes right action, that is, to abstain from taking life, from falsehood, from theft, from sexual misconduct and from using intoxicants and drugs which tend to cloud the mind (Ling, 1991: 88). He further talked about right intentions, right speech, right livelihood, right mindfulness and right concentration. All these are crucial to avoid suffering which is caused by ignorance, meaning lack of illusion in understanding realities in daily life (Violatti, 2014). So majority of the ancient teachers and sages established that knowledge is crucial and is the essence of individual's moral growth which starts from the families.

3. Traditional Family and Moral Values in Africa

In traditional Africa "family includes, children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and other immediate relatives…" The unborn children and departed relatives (the living dead) are also part of the family (Mbiti, 1969:106-107). It should be noted that, African culture is embedded in moral thought which includes the unborn child up to old age. One of the examples is that, during initiation the youths are told to be courageous and endure the pain in case of difficulties. For most people it is the period of education and introduction to tribal knowledge, wisdom and moral life (Mbiti, 1969: 129). It is in similar view that Gichure (2008:39) suggests looking back at the wisdom of ancestors and elders in society are important in order to improve the moral life of the modern generation.

Children in traditional Africa were taught to behave well because God destroy people on the account of their wickedness. In some efforts to create good and moral life of the children's future some communities like Barundi, Chagga, Banyarwanda incorporated God's name into children's names. Names like, *Ndayiziga* (Barundi), meaning "I depend on Him"

(Mbiti, 1969:67). Similarly, among the Chagga, names like '*Msemakweli'* meaning 'one who says the truth'. In this case, the parents wished the child to grow in God's wisdom, hence, develop moral values that could help him/her to be a good person and be accepted in society.

Majority of African societies understand morality as grounded in religion where education starts from families with children and later, girls and boys are taught how to behave well as they prepare for the next stage in life. In some communities' girls are to respect themselves, not to have premarital sexual relationship because such behavior brings disgrace in the family. At marriage the girl is supposed to be a virgin, which is crucial among some African tribes because it symbolizes purity and moral life. Another aspect of moral belief is that "God is capable of showing anger through death, drought and floods". People in Barundi for example, feared that adultery could arouse God's anger and cause Him to punish them with misfortunes (Mbiti, 1969: 141).

From a different dimension, it is believed that God practices justice because He is always right, rewarding good for those who follow good conduct, and evil to those who follow evil conduct" (Mbiti, 1969:37-38). In this perspective, murder, robberies, rape, adultery, lies, slander, stealing cruelty, quarrels, bad words, disrespect to persons of higher status, magic, witchcraft, disobedience of children can cause calamity in families or communities. Bujo (1990:49) argues "Black Africans generally see evil as coming from humans and not from God,…" So children are taught how to avoid bad actions and decision making which have bad consequences to individuals, families and society.

Members of the African family will agree with a Swahili saying that "*Mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo* which literary means "the child will grow the way she/he is brought up". This corresponds to another saying that "a mango tree will always produce mangos and not oranges" which supports the idea of family formation. It must be noted that the value of what a child produces cannot be expected to be good in itself, but only good for helping the child to develop into a good adult, then help others to be good, hence making the world a better place for all to live. Thomas Aquinas argument matches with this idea that

> It is clear that all things are directed to one good as their last end. …it follows that good, as such, is an end. Consequently that which is the supreme good is supremely the end of all. Now

> there is but one Supreme good, namely God. … Therefore all things are directed to the highest good, namely God, as their end (Denise et al pg 91).

What happens in childhood principally affects our view of total lives through the effects that childhood success or failure are supposed to have on mature individuals (Slote, 1983, pg. 14). Concerning the child formation Aristotle said "The moral virtues concern the habitual choice of actions in accordance with rational principles…The good habits necessary to moral virtue are not strictly personal matters but can best be formed in a sound social and legal structure" (Denise, Peterfreund &White 2004:31).

Are there ways the present generation can retrieve moral values from the past? One value being Communitarian "I am because we are" Ubuntu". This is one way that Africans have respected and developed humanness relating to others in the positive way. This is because one person becomes a person solely through other persons, which means that one cannot realize one's true self in opposition to others or even in isolation from them. The issue of corruption in Africa today is not only against the value on being communitarian but also is serious evil because it involves the violation of established societal moral laws. Corruption involves stealing from the common people who cannot access good public services like schools or hospital services because the money went to pockets of individuals. In regard to this reality Baqwa (2000) states that "corruption refers to dishonesty or preferential use of power or position which has the result of one person or organization being advantage over another". This is against ethical practice which denies the right of others to enjoy their economic, social and psychological rights. Families' moral concern is to help children become fully human beings. It means entering more and more in the community with others (Metz, Thaddeus and Gaie, Joseph B.R. 2010).

Julius Nyerere's ideas concerning African people could draw examples from the past generations regarding values about social justice. He said that everyone works and there are principles of working and living together, mutual involvement for helping one another and help people to perform their responsibilities freely. Nyerere (the first president of the Republic of Tanzania) calls to mind the good qualities of the past communitarian life or African socialism and suggests to regain the former attitude of mind, that is, traditional social style (Nyerere, 1968, p. 6). The emphasis here is African's and humanness which is

influenced by positive moral life. Nyerere advocates for moral life based on equality and justice to members of society. In Africa, tribal thinkers develop a strong sense of morality in terms of individuals' sense of responsibility to the family and community. The community understands its responsibility to each individual as it is commonly said 'it takes a village to raise a child"

It must be noted that, in traditional Africa, children belong to the community, it means, instilling moral values to the life of a child is a responsibility of all members of the community. In this respect, family values were taken as a public policy, adhering to the traditional morals as with respect for family life and marriage life. Nyerere uses the word *ndugu*, (brotherhood) indicating the value and dignity of all people, extended family, brotherhood, family hood, community life, togetherness, importance of human being, care for individuals and hospitality. Like people in traditional society, Nyerere believed that everyone had something to offer so as to improve other people's lives. In this regard there is a lot of wisdom that the present generation needs to learn from the old generation.

Human equality goes beyond the tribe, the community and the nation; hence the embrace of all human kind working for the common good is critical. Individuals are to work for social and ethical obligation to improve life in society. In the same way, Pope Francis encourages everyone to value the gifts of marriage and family, to preserve in love the virtues of generosity, commitment, mercy, compassion, fidelity, peace, joy and patience (Amoris Letitia no. 5), which resonate well with traditional African understanding of a dignified life.

4. Amoris Laetitia and African Christian Family moral Values

Moral values are the standard measure of good and evil which govern an individual moral life. Majority of people who are brought up in profound Christian family environment ultimately develop a sense of morality and have a chance to transform their society making it a better place for all to live. Parents feel obliged to disseminate Christian values in the lives of their children, hence influencing them in many ways including respecting others and establishing good relationship with them (King, 1990). The aim of the family is to help children have conviction in their faith as Christians.

In reality "…Human fatherhood and motherhood, while remaining biologically similar to that of the other living beings in nature, contain in an essential and unique way a likeness to God which is the basis of the family and a community of human life, as community of persons united in love" (Compendium, no, 230). Moreover, diligent parents care, supervise and discipline their children transforming and cultivating in them moral character and assisting them to establish better Christian families in the future.

May be one can ask a question like, what is the role of a Christian family in our time? The fundamental task of the family is to serve life, actualizing in history the original blessing of creator by transmitting the divine image through procreation. In this case, enriched by the fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life a father and mother must hand on to their children values that will sustain their families and society (John Paul 11, 2010). According to Bujo (1990: 108) "Procreation is thus a question not only of individual survival, but also community survival". The society values the fruits of marriage which form and develop the family. Parents as ministers of life, are not supposed to forget that the spiritual dimension of procreation is to be given greater consideration than any other aspect "fatherhood and motherhood represent a responsibility which is not simply physical but spiritual in nature, families contribute to the communion of generations, provide irreplaceable support for development in society" (Compendium, no. 237).

Good family formation creates good agents of community, nation and transforms the global family with good values. This is well stated in *Amoris Laetitia* (no. 16) that the family is the place where, children are brought in faith; parents become the first teachers in the faith, passing it from one person to another. The book of Deuteronomy (6:20-25) affirms this argument that "Later on when your son asks you what these ordinances, statutes and decrees mean which the Lord your God has enjoined you , you shall say to your son, we were once slaves of pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand…" Moreover, Compendium (no. 238) states that

> In the work of education, the family forms man in the fullness of his personal dignity according to all his dimensions, including the social dimension. The family constitutes a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society. Contributes to common good and continues the first school of social virtue.

Christian families are invited to value marriage and family life as institutions that create the foundation of moral values in human life. Since every human being comes from a family, teaching children to develop a life acquainted moral values is crucial.

Accordingly, the family founded on Christian marriage is truly the sanctuary of life (compendium, 231) the place where life is the gift of God, hence, expected to be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed in this historical era. It has opportunity to develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth (Centesimus Annus, 39). St. John Chrysostom adds that peaceful relationship between husband and wife results to good formation of children with good discipline and behavior. Parents loving, gentleness and encouragement strengthen the faith and moral life of children (Mutter, 1996: 29-30).

In a similar context, Christian families have a particular mission that makes them disseminators of moral values, witnesses and proclaimers of the gospel, hence, contributing to the social good through responsible motherhood and fatherhood (Compendium, nos.231, 232).

Emmanuel Kant suggests that:

> Moderation in the affection and passion, self-control and calm deliberation are as not only good in many aspects, but even seem to constitute part of the intrinsic worth of the person…for without a principle of a good will, they may become extremely bad….A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end but simply by virtue of the volition, that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favour of any inclination… (Denise et al, pg. 130).

Christian families learn how to execute their duties from the Holy Scripture as stated in 2 Timothy (3: 16-17) that "All Scriptures is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness….".With knowledge obtained from the Scripture and Christian family formation of a child is sound, since such wisdom is not ordinarily gained elsewhere. Home education is not for intellectual, but virtues, that is, formation of the heart leading the young person from one level of knowledge to a new knowledge in the orderly fashion

necessary for the growth in the moral virtues (King, 1990). This is because in Africa "the heart is looked upon as the main seat of moral life… good and evil arise from the interior of the human being", the heart (Bujo, pg. 98).

In this context education of the heart has to be taken seriously in the family, in order to enhance the spirit of people being good and acting in a noble manner. So, formation of moral values implies education of the heart, which determines the right thing to do and the wrong thing not to do. In this context family is a place where children are brought up in faith which enhances moral life (Amoris no. 16). Reading and understanding God's word in families is imperative as it transforms the hearts and minds of children who will pass the instructions to the next generations. In connection to the heart training, Bujo states:

> The Banyarwanda and the Bashi call it 'man's little king'…Whoever has a 'single heart' is a human being who is sincere and reliable. On the other hand the person with 'two hearts' is double faced, dubious, and his intentions are not obvious. With the Bahema this expression signifies particularly that one is dealing with an evil person. The Batelela say of a person who is guilty: 'he has a dirty heart', showing that good and evil have their seats there… (Bujo, 100).

When religious education is well taught in families it is the heart that is touched, the person has an experience of continuous conversion as he/she grows. This is in relation to David Hume's argument that "What is honorable, what is fair, what is becoming, what is noble, what is generous, takes possession of the heart and animates to embrace and maintain it…" (Denise, pg. 118). Moral values in the life of many Christians manifest in their daily living as directed by the heart. The family is crucial for forming the heart since it constitutes one of the most precious human values, it is a place where children are brought up and helped to discern vocations in life. Indeed there is evidence that the seeds of success in education are sawn in hearts of children especially during their childhood.

With the formation of the children's hearts, a family is turned into domestic church (Amoris no. 15), living and witnessing the Triune God. It is known well that God lives in well formed Christian hearts as opposed to hearts that are not formed. For the many African communities an unformed heart is "dirty heart, bad heart" which is not able to resist evils. In relation to that Aquinas says "The will is not always directed to what is truly good, but sometimes to the apparent

good; and this has indeed some measure of good, but not of a good that is suitable absolutely to be desired. Hence it is that the act of the will is not always good, but sometimes evil. …" (Denise et al pg. 95). It can be argued that some evils are done out of ignorance, that is why it is important to keenly build a foundation of moral life in families.

A trained heart is expected to understand the goal of Christian life, to live well here on earth and eventually be happy with God in the next life. St. Augustine says "the earthy city pursues material interests and carnal pleasures. They not only suffer the frustrations about by their false beliefs while on earth but also endure the everlasting alienation from God" (Denise et al pg. 71). Dwelling on the similar view, John Stuart Mill states "The force of an internal sanction derives from the feeling of pleasure that is experienced when a moral law is obeyed and the feeling of pain that accompanies a violation of it" Denise et al pg. 143).

In the same perspective, Masaro (2016: 91) asserts:

> The Family occupies a special, the first place where children learn the contours of human life, the wider social world, is the most basic unit of society, children develop their individual identities and discover their vocations within the wider social world, domestic church where young people first encounter God, form their consciences, and learn moral virtues, it is the first cell of society.

In this point of view it can be argued that the well-being of the entire society absolutely depends on healthy families, committed marriages, and responsible parenthood. Family life is where people learn and practice the virtues of love and compassion. "The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon-not an idol like those of stone or gold….fruitful love becomes a symbol of God's inner life" (Amoris Laetitia, no. 11). In support of this idea Masaro (pg. 91) says that in families parents make it possible, witnessing unconditional love of God. In such environment positive moral actions and life values are nurtured.

5. Amoris Laetitia and Challenges Facing Christian Families

In Africa Christian families are of different categories nomadic and agricultural, monogamous and polygamous, families of the disadvantaged like migrant workers and single parents families just to mention a few. It is unfortunate that in our time, family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it. Well being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family (John Paul 11, 2010, No, 7). The challenges in families, communities and society at large caused by social, economic and cultural changes in the world today are moral issues that contribute to the destabilization of Christian marriage and families. Wisdom of ancestors and elders matter a lot, but the question is whether the modern parents bother to learn from such people as was in the past, that:

> …young must be taught the values and administrative wisdom of the ancestors… Education was the tool by which young people got to discover their potential as well as their limitations, internal and external. Its most important methods were the communal exercises carried out within one's age-set at different rites of passage: the initiation of adulthood and concomitant circumcision, the preparation for marriage and the begetting of children, and the passage to senior elder status (Gichure, 2008:39).

It must be noted that "….Family life itself is constantly challenged by the existence of new family patterns that do not conform to accustomed notion of nuclear family… same sex marriage, new reproductive technologies, family breakdown and divorce just to mention a few (Masaro, 2016: 92). It is important for the Church to find new techniques of strengthening the families which are crucial and form the very fabric of healthy society and nations. Family stability and wellbeing is crucial, hence if families are not well formed, the Church becomes weak as well. The biggest concern is to help others become fully human- which implies entering more and more in the community with them as they are guided in various stages of life (Mert &Gaie, 2010). In this context, Children in Christian families need to share the spirituality of their parents who are the foundations of the homes, while children are the living stones (Amoris Laetitia, no. 12).

There is widespread evidence that the increasing of destructive behaviours among contemporary youths result from drug and alcohol abuse which is a serious challenge. This makes one to ask a question concerning the quality of Christians and status of the future Church which depends on the families for her progress. It is in the same context that Pope Francis states "The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and of the Church" (Amoris Laetitia, no. 31).

Christian commitment, cultural changes, individualism, loneliness and other challenges of moral decay contribute in weakening the Christian family values. One may ask questions on how should the Church and society work together in response to moral decline in the world of our time? How should families be morally nurtured in our time in order to raise young people who are able to witness Christ? How should the church and society respond to moral infraction? Are there ways that can be used by the present generation to retrieve moral values from the past? These are questions that can help reflection focusing on discovering the strategies that can protect and promote family moral life.

Perhaps avoiding sexual promiscuity, stealing public funds, suicide and homicide just to mention a few could be possible if authentic Christian family formation is given primacy. Lack of proper formation in the family is one of the challenge why evils exist in society. Others are Social degeneration brought by sin, greedy and selfish. (Amoris Laetitia, no. 26). There are many other challenges that threaten the family life such as divorce which leave children in a dilemma. The most affected people when couples divorce are children, they may perform poorly in school, frustration, anger, feeling guilty and many others. This takes away from children the right to enjoy the love and care of the two parents. It is their human right to get proper formation from both the father and mother. Consequently,

> The ideal of marriage, marked by commitment to exclusivity and stability is swept aside whenever it proves inconvenient or tiresome. The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in relationship that could hamper the achievement of one's personal goals (Amoris Laetitia, no. 34).

The present challenges of globalization and social changes require aggressive married couples ongoing formation to give them confidence in facing social and moral issues of our time. This will enable couples to provide good family formation, hence enable their children acquire values respect, kindness, self-control that are important for their moral growth as affirmed in Proverb 22:6 "Train a boy in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not swerve from it" However, this can be possible if Christian marriages are valued, hence, establishing a family where all vocations are profoundly natured.

Notwithstanding, it should be noted that erosion of moral values in the modern society is a great concern and threat to family life. To evaluate, promote or even challenge the moral decay that is displayed in the contemporary society is part of the challenge. "What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them" hence promote moral values through formation in the families (Amoris Laetitia, no. 35).

In the past it was difficult to see couples living together without the benefit of legal matrimonial ceremony, customary marriage or religious marriage ceremony. Nowadays people live together without any kind of formation, consequently bearing children who also cannot get good formation. Those without formation are also supposed to give formation to their children. The kind of formation they give to their children is questionable. However, there is a disturbing degradation of fundamental values, growing number of divorces as mentioned earlier, and scourge of abortion. Despite all these, individuals with moral disposition can perform only good deeds (Denise et al pg. 222). Spiritual experience is a source of good and positive energy which has its foundation from the families through moral formation.

6. Conclusion

In a nut shell, moral life in the present time denotes some kind of struggle; it is about striving to attain the ultimate end. Therefore, it demands one to respect other people, doing good to transform life so as to make the world a better place for all to live while well connected to God. Leading a moral life is a universal call to holiness for all Christians, thus enabling the love and goodness of God be reflected in families, communities and societies. Children depend on the teaching and formation in families to develop moral life. In this case the hearts of children which are the seats of conscience need profound formation. This lays the foundation of authentic Christian values. Moral formation of one person is expected to help many others in the present and future generations, due to the fact that all Christians are called to moral goodness and authentic holiness. In the words of Thomas Hobbes "Object of man's desire is good and object of his hate is evil" (Denise et al, pg.100). Christian moral values go beyond societal mores and selfish instincts; instead it involves total commitment and sacrifice as suggested in Amoris Laetitia (no.33, 34). Since God is the source of all goodness, hence, Christians who love God are to behave correctly, to show their respect and love to Him. "If you love me

you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). In this case, one develops a behavior that is acceptable and not harmful in the community or society. In Africa this process includes nurturing of moral values starting from the family by parents, teachers in schools, elders, and religious institutions, many other members of the society and all people of good will.

6.1 Recommendations

The church should often organize seminars and conferences to help modern married couples know how to choose true values and how to integrate them into an evolving world culture, hence join all humanity towards formation of the new future well-formed Christian generation.

The Triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection. So Christian Families should be encouraged to help the Church in demonstrating more practical love through moral formation of their children and also through benevolence and charity.

The past is not completely absent from the present. The traditional society is still and will still continue to be relevant part of contemporary African history. Therefore, retrieval of moral values like forgiveness, respect, patience, kindness, compassion and courage just to mention a few will reduce the rates of divorce.

The present challenges of globalization and social changes require aggressive married couples ongoing formation to give them confidence in facing moral issues of our time. This will enable couples to provide good family formation hence preparing authentic Christian families of all time.

Christian families have a special calling; they should be encouraged to learn wisdom from the scripture and from many people who lived holy family lives.

Moral rules are the rules given by nature and fostered by intermediary agents, so spouses need more skills through good marriage preparation on how to incarnate love, patience, charity and many other virtues to their children.

Church leaders at every level should strengthen family catechesis; develop pre-marriage courses that can assist the youth to form stable Christian families. This can help Christian families to evangelize to each other, reach out the society as a whole. They should encourage family prayer life; help Christian families play an active role of being a model school for children, to bring the light of Christian families in the world.

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