

ST. PAUL AND CHRISTIAN WOMEN: MISSION FOR EVANGELIZATION

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1. Introduction

Women, generally, have always been a big force to reckon with in any society, more so, Christian women. It is as a result of this indisputable fact that the proper education of women all over the world is always being clamoured for by all well meaning people. This writer was present at the Family Forum which was organized by the Catholic Women's Organisation of Onitsha Archdiocese on Saturday, the 28th day of February, 2009. The main topic was "St. Paul and Christian society." The enthusiasm and readiness which was visibly manifested by these women were better witnessed than described. I left the conference arena more convinced than ever, that this is a group which holds much prospect for the development of both the Church and our society.

On a related note, one observes that a simple look at our actual situation on the ground reveals this fact that in any parish where the Church is progressing and dynamically forging ahead, there is a dynamic Parish Priest and a dynamic Christian women's organization. And in the society, it seems a truism, as well, that whenever we have the opportunity to have serious minded women up there in the helm of societal affairs – I mean in the government – the society is better for it. These are, indeed, serious and commendable points for our womenfolk. Therefore, this article is aimed at bringing out how the legacy of St. Paul could further help to catalyse the efforts of our Christian women in the Church's perennial mission of evangelizing the world.

2. Some Clarifications

It would be nice to begin with the brief clarification of three key terms in this article, namely, "mission", "Christian women" and "evangelization".

In the Scriptures, "mission" means "the sending by God of a person for the purpose of communicating his will to other persons; thus, there are the missions of the Divine Persons, the missions of angels, the mission of Christ."¹ In this understanding, one also speaks of the mission of the Church. That mission of the Church comes from Jesus himself. Generically speaking, it connotes the sending of persons with authority to preach the Gospel in accordance with the text: "But how shall they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10,15).² Hence Jesus gave the Church this mission after his resurrection:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Matt 28,18-20).

Thus, the end of the mission of the Church, just like that of Christ himself, is to procure the glory of God through the eternal salvation of all men and women of every culture and race. Christ came to seek and to save that which had been lost. Therefore, the care of souls is the proper and primary end of the mission of the Church:

In keeping with this end, the Church propagates the faith of Christ in order to bring men to the light of divine wisdom, teaches men to observe all that Christ commanded, promotes among them the exercise of Christian virtues and good works of all kinds, directs

¹ R. HOFFMAN, "Mission", in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IX, (904-905), 904.

² HOFFMAN, "Mission", 904.

them in the worship of God, and thus seeks their eternal happiness.³

This task is for all the followers of Christ, and not just that of the hierarchy, because all of us are "bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men."⁴ Yet, in the secular society and particularly with regard to secular duties and activities, the laity have a special responsibility which their pastors, the clergy, do not have. Vatican II outlines it as follows: "The laity are called to participate actively in the whole life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with the spirit of Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind."⁵ It is, indeed, here that the Christian women particularly come into the picture, as all should be involved, as already mentioned, in this on-going process of evangelization. They come in here not just as Christians but also as women and mothers who have, therefore, special roles to play in the Church and in the society.

And simply stated, "evangelization", is the preaching of the Good News to the world. It could also be called "Evangelism". R. Matzerath distinguishes two principal senses of this term:

In its basic sense the term has meant, from the beginning of Christianity, the communication of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In its modern sense it designates the process by which a person is led to make a commitment to Christ, dedicate himself to a Christian way of life, and become a vital member of the local Church.⁶

³ HOFFMAN, "Mission", 904.

⁴ VATICAN II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*", no. 1, in A. FLANNERY, ed., *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1975) 903.

⁵ VATICAN II, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*", no. 43, in A. FLANNERY, ed., *Vatican Council II*, 944.

⁶ R. MATZERATH, "Evangelism" in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol V, 650.

To be precise, and as one may already suspect, the Christian women with which this write up is principally concerned are those women who make up the Catholic Women's Organisation (CWO). This group could be said to be generally made up of all lay Catholic Women.⁷ These Catholic women could be said to aim, among other points, at the Christian formation of all her members by trying to inculcate into them a deeper understanding of the liturgy and life of the Church and a deeper participation in these aspects. They lead the members to a greater involvement in the lay apostolate of the Church as well as to unity of mind and action.⁸ This write up is, therefore, an attempt – as already hinted above – at exploring how the life and teachings of St. Paul could engender this mission of these Christian Women for evangelization in the Church and in the society.

3. The Year of St. Paul

The year of St. Paul has just been celebrated, spanning from June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009. This was announced by the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI, on June 28, 2007 in his homily during the First Vespers of the Solemnity of Ss. Peter and Paul in the Basilica of St. Paul outside-the-Walls. The Pope lauded the heroic sacrifices and sufferings of these two great pillars of the Church of Rome which eventually came to a climax in their martyrdom there in Rome. Particularly on St. Paul, the Supreme Pontiff emphasized: "He lived and worked for Christ, for him he suffered and died. How truly his example is today!"⁹ Hence, the legacy of St. Paul is not what is limited to just that year of St. Paul. Rather, it is a lasting one. It is for "today", in the words of the Holy Father.

So much has been discussed and written during the year of St. Paul. A lot of works have also been published. But going through the enormous literature there now is, one does not see much, modestly speaking, regarding specifically the Catholic Women, in spite of their already noted importance in the Church and society. This writer would also like to contribute, in this article, to this specific need.

⁷ *The Constitution of the Catholic Women's Organization (C.W.O.) of Onitsha Archdiocese* (Revised Edition) (Onitsha: Goodmark, 2006) 4.

⁸ *The Constitution of the Catholic Women's Organization*, 3.

⁹ [Http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2007/docum](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2007/docum)

4. Who is Paul

Paul was a Jew. His original name was Saul (Acts 7,58; 8,1,3). He was a Pharisee (cf. Acts 22,3), from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3,5; Rom 11,1) but was born and raised in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia (Acts 9,11; 21,39; 22,3).

The most dramatic thing about Paul was his conversion to Christianity. Prior to this conversion, Paul actively preserved and protected the religious traditions of his forefathers in Judaism. He, therefore, intensely persecuted the Christian Church (Gal 1,13,23; Phil 3,6; 1Cor 15,9) and was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7,58; 8,1; 22,20). It was, however, while he was on his way to Damascus to further his self-assigned plan of persecuting the Christians there that he miraculously got converted. He suddenly experienced a vision of Christ (Gal 1,12,16; Acts 9,3-8; 22,6-11; 26,12-19). This encounter with the Risen Lord had dramatic results on Paul: It changed his entire life, self-understanding, theological views and goals. It produced a complete u-turn in his life, turning him from a persecutor to a propagator of Christianity! For him, only Christ is important! It is, thus, Christ himself who commissioned him to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles (cf. also Rom 1,5).

After that dramatic encounter, according to the Acts of the Apostles, Paul engaged in three distinct missionary journeys (cf. Acts 13,2-15,29; 15,36-18,22; 18,23-21,16). During these journeys, he evangelized many peoples and helped to establish Churches among them. To these Churches, Paul wrote letters to keep up the relationship with them and to encourage them in the faith. He also wrote to individuals with whom he had worked in establishing these Churches. The surviving letters among these are what we now have in the New Testament. They are: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Romans and Philemon. Others are: Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.¹⁰

¹⁰ Scholars have tried to distinguish between the "genuine" letters of St. Paul and the non-genuine letters, the former being those strongly believed to have been written by Paul himself. For the purposes of this write up, such a distinction would seem unnecessary as all the above-named letters are pastorally considered Pauline. All are also part of the canonical scriptures recognized by the Church as being inspired and normative.

Paul was later arrested in Jerusalem but as he appealed to Caesar, stemming from his right as a Roman citizen, he was sent to Rome for trial. According to 1 Clem. 5, 4-5, Paul later suffered a martyr's death there in Rome.

5. Lessons from Paul

5.1 The Family

The Christian women have a lot to learn from St. Paul regarding the family. As already indicated, the Christian women are both "Christians" and "mothers" – and, on account of the centrality of the family in this regard, this article will go on with some explanations on it.

The New Catholic Encyclopedia defines that unit of society as follows:

The family may be broadly defined as a primary social group or unit based on a procreative partnership of the sexes and normally constituted by the community of parents and children. The meaning of the term is sometimes extended to include the entire group of persons living in one house and under one head, that is, household. In common usage the term may also denote all the persons sharing a common line of descent¹¹

Although also a natural institution – in the sense that it belongs to the order of nature – the family is of divine origin. This is because God created man in his own image; in the beginning he created them male and female and blessed them with fecundity, charging them to master creation (Gen 1,26-31). From both the divine and natural dimensions, therefore, the family becomes the most important unit of the society:

¹¹ J.L. THOMAS, "Family" in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. V, 825.

Thus, according to the Creator's plan, the society formed by parents and children is to become the foundation of all human community, for He has entrusted it with the continuity of the race; in fulfilling this task it becomes both the enduring focus of man's basic loyalties and commitments and the perennially renewed seminary of love within which the members of each successive generation receive their initial schooling in the knowledge and practice of His Great Commandment.¹²

The family is also the first unit of the society. To that end, it "holds a place of crucial significance in the development and destiny of man, for it socializes him as a child and determines the basic framework of relationships within which he fulfils himself as an adult."¹³ Children are formed during the most pliable period of their lives. They learn the basic habits of personality and character by the example and teaching in the family and by participation in all life's activities. They receive their training in it as future adults and active members of other societies: Church, state and the business world.¹⁴

It has, therefore, been recognized for a very long time now, that if the family functions well, then the Church and the society also function properly. But if the family is not going very well, the Church and society are also badly affected. We build on the foundations already laid in the family. This is precisely the point which the Archbishop of Onitsha strongly underlined in the just concluded Synod for Africa in Rome: "In order to foster reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa and the world, it is imperative that efforts should be geared towards equipping the members of God's household from the beginning and from their most natural ambience. The family is the most basic unit of the society from which to commence this effort."¹⁵

¹² THOMAS, "Family", 827.

¹³ THOMAS, "Family", 826.

¹⁴ I. A. DE BLANC, "Family", in *The Catholic Encyclopedia for School and Home*, Vol. IV, 224-232 (225).

¹⁵ V.M. OKEKE, "Church as Family" from "Nigerian Bishops – Intervention from Synod's 10th Congregation", [Http://Www.Vatican.va](http://Www.Vatican.va), (pp. 3-4), 4.

Thus, St. Paul has a lot of encouraging words for the family and its well-being. This we find in his Epistle to the Ephesians 5,21-6,4. A shorter version of this he also presents in the letter to the Colossians, as follows:

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart (Col 3,18-21).

That the mother in any family is the life wire of that family is a truism. She keeps the tempo and the rhythm in the whole family. On account of this very important role which she plays, she helps also to bring and maintain her husband on the right path. She helps to bring up the children properly, in love and in obedience to the Church. The book of Sirach recognized this fact. It is full of praises for the good wife: She is a fortune to her husband, whose longevity of life will, thus, be doubled. She brings joy to her husband, who then lives in peace. She is a precious blessing and gift given to those who fear God. Her beauty and her keeping the home well are "like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord" (Sirach 26,1-4.13-16).

To be true to her name, the Christian woman must always respect her husband, advises St. Paul. This is a very important virtue. She should also endeavour to bring up her family in mutual respect and the fear of God. Naturally, the issue of the relationship between married couples with each other can sometimes be difficult, as the partners often come from different backgrounds. Nevertheless, Paul insists that these difficulties can always be surmounted, given proper understanding and love between the couples. Together, then, the Christian women and their husbands would be able to bring up their children well. And these children would, in turn, make good people in society.

5.2 The Church

Paul succeeded in his mission and apostolate because he did not work alone. Other people, men and women, worked together with him. He also allowed them to work with him. Among these are Phoebe, a deaconess of the Church at Cenchreae (Rom 16,1), as well as the family of Aquila and Prisca, to whom Paul makes thankful references in some of his letters. For instance, Paul wrote to the Romans: "Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks" (Rom 16,3-5; cf. also 1Cor 16,19 and 2Tim 3,19). He also addresses Philemon: "Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved fellow worker..." (Philem 1-2).

The recognition given to these women by Paul, echoes the roles generally played by women in the Bible and especially during the time of Jesus, in his life and ministry. Held has actually observed that although both men and women listened to Christ's doctrine (Matt 14,21; 15,28; John 4,7-42) and were objects of his healing power (Luke 8,2; 13,13; Matt 8,14-15; 9,20-22; Mark 7,25-30) and forgiveness (Luke 7,48-50; John 8,3-11), he accepted the services of the holy women (Mark 15,40-41; Luke 8,1-3; John 19,25). He also accepted the sympathy of the daughters of Jerusalem (Luke 23,27-30). Among those who followed him closely, it was the women, and not the men, who were more faithful to Him till the end (Matt 27,55-56). The first news of Christ's resurrection was given to women, and hence they were chosen to bring these tidings to the Apostles (Matt 28,1-10; Mark 16,6-8; Luke 24,1-11 and John 20,1-2.11-18).¹⁶

It must be underlined again that Paul was able to succeed in his great and involving apostolate because he could work with other people – some of them being women. Paul was involved with these people in "collaborative ministry". Nwachukwu observes that from its etymology, the word "collaboration" brings out the "sense of a 'work' (*laborare*) undertaken 'together' (*Col*).¹⁷ She continues:

¹⁶ M.L.HELD, "Woman (in the Bible)" in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol XIV, 998.

¹⁷ M.S. NWACHUKWU, "Biblical Framework for the Spirituality of collaborative Ministry", in I.M.C. OBINWA, ed., *Collaborative Ministry in*

Yet, such a sense of work cannot be imposed on the members of a group. It is demanded that those involved possess the willingness and the capability to work together. In this sphere, the most sincere starting point is to admit that collaborative ministry is not easy. It is relational; it can demand working closely and intensely with others.¹⁸

Yes! Although it may not be easy, Paul was able to engage in it successfully, thereby posing a big challenge to all of us.

Actually, the CWO has done very well in sustaining and helping to develop the Church in this part of the world at various levels, parish, diocesan, national and universal levels. Their purposeful, dynamic and action-oriented leadership at all these levels is to be loudly praised. Njoku, for instance, marvels at their organizational acumen and dynamic power: "Their commitment to issues are usually profound. Their executions of projects are really amazing. Their implementations of decisions are with military dispatch. The power of these groups cannot be doubted."¹⁹

I was around in Rome a few years back during one of their international conferences. At the end of one particular session which lasted for quite some time, most of the representatives from Africa spontaneously burst into a heartily hilarious and ring-like dancing, clapping and singing. They were boisterously hugging and congratulating one another for a near feat achieved during that particular session. Upon enquiry, although no one told me what the matter actually was, I learnt that virtually all the women representatives from Africa had presented a united front and

the Context of Inculturation: Proceedings of the Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN) held at Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha (March 29 to April 1, 2005) (Onitsha: Africana First Publishers, 2006) 56-73 (68).

¹⁸ NWACHUKWU, "Biblical Framework for the Spirituality of collaborative Ministry", 68.

¹⁹ U.J. NJOKU, "The Eastern Nigerian Women War of 1929 as a model for the Role of Women in the African Church", in *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, Vol 7, no. 2, (2005) (118-135), 129.

vehemently defended a particular stand before all the women from all over the world in a particular thorny issue of discussion. At the end, that view won the day in spite of all the seemingly insurmountable odds. Hence, the hearty cheering and dancing! Given this dynamism, the CWO has become a perennial challenge especially to her male counterpart, the Catholic Men's Organization (CMO).

In short, St. Paul challenges all of us strongly in this aspect. And although the Christian *women* have been commended in this regard, this great apostle still challenges them to greater heights. Their mission and apostolate would always call for constant fine-tuning, especially at the Parish levels.

5.3 The Government²⁰

Paul enjoins everyone to be subject and obedient to the government (Rom 13,1-7): "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom 13,1). After some basic explanations regarding this essential advice (Rom 13,2-4), he then concludes:

Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honour to whom honour is due (Rom 13,5-7).

A similar injunction is also given in 1Pet 2,13-17. All that has basic roots in Jesus' injunction to the Pharisees and scribes: "Render

²⁰ Some of the views expressed here have been more extensively developed in a lecture at Tansi Major Seminary Onitsha, cf. E.U. DIM, *The Christian and the governing Authorities (Rom. 13,1-7) – The Nigerian Situation*, Blessed Iwene Tansi Major Seminary, Onitsha, Inaugural Lecture Series, no. 6 (Onitsha: Tansi Seminary Publications, 2009).

to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12,13-17).

What does this mean in practical terms. Vatican II explains it that although all Christians are called to obey their rulers, there is, however, imposed on them the obligation of always actively participating in government and in choosing the people that govern them themselves. In other words, in line with Rom 13,1-5, the choice of the political regime and the appointment of rulers are to be left to the free decision of the citizens.²¹ It was Pope John Paul II who summarized it all in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* in the following words:

In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in "public life", that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good.²²

Our problems in Nigeria have been made worse by bad governments. Yet, our main problem is leadership itself. A land that is full of riches has almost half of its citizens wallowing in abject poverty – in basic income, roads, water, electricity, hospitals, schools, telephones, etc. It is the duty of Christian women in the family, in the Church and in the society, to help choose the type of government we want. It is your duty – those who can – to also serve as top executives in government in order to salvage our situation. Those women who have attempted it, as already hinted above, have been largely successful both in the country and internationally. Women, as a group,

²¹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*", 74, in A. FLANNERY, ed., *Vatican Council II*, 981.

²² JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World "Christifideles Laici"*, 42 (Bombay: Pauline, 1995) 121.

have in the past helped to change the general political contours and circumstances of our country. An enduring example in Eastern Nigeria was the Aba riots of 1929, the so called "women's war," "which effectively overturned or modified colonial policy with regard to taxation and the installation of warrant chiefs."²³ Such catalysing bravery and fortitude are called for now more than ever on the part of our womenfolk both as a group and as individuals. Time has passed when politics was said to be dirty. Even if it be, we Christians – and Catholics emphatically – must make it clean. We can show others how the game of politics is to be reasonably played. Here again, Paul challenges all of us. But this challenge becomes especially emphasized in the case of the Christian women in this write up regarding their specific mission and apostolate in the Church.

5.4 General Christian living

St. Paul emphasizes love as the highest of gifts and commandments, with the result that if one has all the gifts but has no love, he or she has nothing (1Cor 13,113).

Paul championed the cause of the poor throughout his ministry. He was the apostle of the Gentiles. He ordered the Church in Galatia and in Corinth to make serious contributions for the Church in Jerusalem. This collection he carried to Jerusalem himself (1Cor 16,1-4). He also helped to plead for the slave Onesimus who had run away from his master Philemon. This is the main point of the letter to Philemon. The normal punishment for such a slave would be execution. But Paul pleaded with Philemon to forgive Onesimus. He writes:

So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay it (Philemon 17-19).

²³ E.E. UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996) 138.

This writer is aware of some of the major projects undertaken by the CWO at various levels for the poor, especially for widows. It has to be said that the deplorable lot of the indigent and poor in this country remains a big indictment on the Christianity of all of us. The life and teachings of St. Paul stares equally at the faces of all of us. However, as the Christian women have tried to show some light as a group in this area, as already indicated, St. Paul exhorts them all the more to greater heights. This exhortation extends to the maids and house helps in the homes. Paul's general consideration for the poor and, especially, his treatment of Onesimus must always speak to us!

4.5 Prayer

Paul knew very well the importance of prayer in the life of any Christian. He, therefore, prayed constantly and urged others to do the same. Hence, he requests the Thessalonians: "Pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5,17). Also, he enjoins the Colossians: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Col 4,2).

Paul requests for prayers from the Christian community: "Brethren, pray for us" (1 Thess 5,25). "And pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ on account of which I am in prison" (Col 4,3). On this issue of prayer, cf. also 2 Thess 3,1-2; Phil 1,19.

Prayer is the entering into a deep relationship with God. It is our response which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, to the Father's invitation into relationship, communion and communication with him in Jesus.²⁴ Without prayer a Christian cannot do much. Indeed, the life and example of St. Paul should also be a point of reference here. Prayer should be the bedrock of our Christian lives. The Christian woman should always remember St. Monica's example as she constantly prayed for his son, Augustine.

Thus, all we have suggested above become easier through constant prayer. Only with constant prayer can Christian women and, indeed, every Christian – live good Christian lives, lives of purity of body and soul, as Paul maintains that our bodies are temples of the

²⁴ K.J. HANLON, *Paul: Pastor of communities for today* (Middlegreen: St. Paul, 1991) 113.

Holy Spirit (1Cor 3,16-17); lives of love and forgiveness. Only with constant prayer can they be exemplary Catholic women, living out their Christian lives in the family, in the Church and in the general society.

6. Conclusion

There are a lot of things to be learnt from St. Paul. What has been penned down above could be said to be a summary of what that great apostle represents, especially for the Christian women – and more especially for the Catholic women in the Catholic Women's Organization (CWO).

It is a fact that the CWO has played a commendable role in evangelization in the Church and society. We thank God for what this group really represents. What this paper has tried to do is to highlight the major aspects of the legacy of St. Paul, to emphasize them and to encourage our Christian women to aspire to greater heights in playing their definite but unique roles in the general mission of Christians to evangelize the world.

To that end, much of what has been said in this write up has highlighted the roles of our womenfolk as a group. But this presumes also their elevated and challenging roles, first of all, as individuals, as a group is naturally made up of individuals. Paul himself left us his legacy primarily as an individual person. Thus, it must be solicited that all hands be on deck on this matter – and not just those of the womenfolk alone. The assurance of the basic rights and privileges of these women in our society and culture would naturally mean greater encouragement for them and, all things being equal, greater productivity on their part. This is because, as Uzukwu has also observed, "on the issue of individual rights and privileges, Africa has had its share of the oppression of women."²⁵ Paul, then, challenges all of us on this particular issue: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3,28). May St. Paul pray for us! May St. Paul help, especially, our Christian women as they keep learning from his apostolic legacy.

²⁵ UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 138.

THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

ISSN 0794-9715

JUNE 2010 Vol. 24

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Published by the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria (CATHAN)