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BOOK REVIEW

Conflict transformation for sustainable Christian marriage

IbukunOluwa, J. & IbukunOluwa, R. (Ibadan, Nigeria: Simplex Creations, 2022). pp. 76. ISBN: 978-978-59646-0-8 (paperback). Price: 1000 Nigerian Naira.

In the Bible, Prophet Amos (Amos 3:3 NKJV) rhetorically asks: "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?". This is the backdrop to this 76-page book co-written by a married couple. Rev. Prof. S. Ola. Ayankeye reiterates this in his foreword to the book:

Every couple on earth experience[s] conflict; how each home turns out, largely depends on the willingness to understand, manage and transform the conflicts that exist into stepping stones to a harmonious marital experience (p. 9).

This book, regarded by the authors as a manual and resource material to be used by individuals, couples, groups, fellowships, and churches, highlights some salient issues to be known and addressed about conflict, marriage, biblical concepts of conflict and marriage, and how conflict can be transformed in a Christian marriage. Therefore, the purpose of the book, as stated by the authors, is to help couples learn to manage conflict and grow into transforming marital conflict to sources of strength to home, blessings to the society and glorifying God, the owner of the home (p. 15).

The book consists of a foreword, a preface, how to use the book, introduction, seven chapters,



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and references. The book abounds in Bible quotations and references, as the primary author is a trained and seasoned pastor. He is also a Bible teacher, conference speaker, disciple maker, home builder, and mentor. After serving as pastor of many churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, he is currently the national coordinator of the Convention Youth Ministries. His wife, the co-author, is an experienced teacher of Biology in one of Nigeria's colleges of education.

The book's foreword was written by Rev. Prof. S. Ola. Ayankeye, professor of practical theology at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso. He emphasises the importance of togetherness in marriage. Despite this, couples experience conflicts in their relationships. The writer of the foreword is convinced that the authors have done well to address the causes and solutions of some of these conflicts.

Chapter One introduces the reader to the general concept of conflict. The authors give different definitions of conflict, according to some scholars. Having delved briefly into what conflict resolution, conflict transformation, conflict prevention, and conflict management entail, the authors highlight some facts that couples should know about conflicts.

The authors give an overview of marriage in Chapter Two. They start with how some scholars view marriage, especially in the African culture, and conclude with the biblical view of marriage. Referring to many passages in the Bible, the authors reiterate that God ordains marriage to be between a husband (one man) and a wife (one woman). God has some specific purposes in initiating this institution.

In Chapter Three, the authors focus on the biblical perspective on conflict transformation. In this instance, some conflicts in the Bible, especially those involving couples, are cited. The authors draw some lessons to learn from the life of Joseph in the face of conflict. Although the case of Joseph, as used in this instance, was not between couples, but between brothers, yet, how Joseph handled the conflict between him and his brothers can be applied to handling conflicts between couples. The authors give other instances of conflict transformation in the New Testament at the end of the chapter.

In Chapter Four, the authors establish the reality of conflict in Christian marriage, by citing some scholars and referring to some biblical passages. To corroborate this reality, the authors briefly explain some sources of marital conflict such as religion, marital responsibilities, the environment of the couple, cultural background of the parties in the relationship, personalities of the couple, educational background of the couple, the profession of the couple, the world view of the couple, third parties in the relationship such as

extended family members, the health situation of one or both of the couple, sex and sexuality, as well as finances.

Chapter Five focuses “on transformational conflict management skills needed in Christian marriage” (p. 37). Quoting intermittently from the Bible, the authors discuss some “skills” that couples “can build, to become successful at transforming conflict at home” (p. 37). These “skills” include viewing conflict as an opportunity to grow; having the right perspective of one’s spouse; assessing oneself first; referencing the home purpose and values; identifying primary issues; envisioning a shared future; communicating effectively; listening actively; practising empathy; problem-solving; having a positive attitude; being level-headed; being patient; understanding and using body language; being impartial; being open to discussion; capturing lessons learnt from previously resolved conflicts, and knowing when to quit the relationship especially when the conflict is “difficult to be transformed” (p. 48). The authors conclude this chapter by reiterating maturity in Christ in applying these skills as mentioned above.

Chapter Six is undoubtedly written by the second author, who is a woman. The chapter deals with the woman’s perspective on conflicts in Christian marriage. This caused the chapter to be a spill-over of some issues that were discussed in the previous chapters. Since a Christian marriage “comprises two people (of opposite sex) ... coming together as husband and wife to live after their Master’s purpose for their lives” (p. 51), conflicts are bound to happen in the relationship. This chapter enumerates some of the sources of these conflicts from a woman’s perspective: loveless relationship, differences in values system, raising children, finance, selfishness, lack of communication, lack of sexual intimacy, not spending enough time together, sexual infidelity and addiction, different life stages (especially in women), third party/in-laws’ presence, bad or ungodly friends, and food. This chapter also offers a biblical perspective on conflict resolution, especially regarding women.

This chapter discusses conflict transformation steps for a Christian woman. These steps include watching and praying; understanding each other; getting to the root of the problem; communication style; avoiding ambiguity; settling issues step-by-step; having listening ears; forgetting the past; minding one’s actions; not apportioning blame; forgiving one another, and growing in oneness. The chapter concludes with the notion that the man or the woman cannot claim perfection in resolving conflicts.

The last chapter of the book highlights some positive effects of conflict. Some of these effects, to which the authors refer as “benefits of conflict transformation”, are effective communication, relationship-building, problem-solving skill, marital growth and progress, marital joy and fulfilment,

purpose-oriented marriage, creating a conducive environment, growth of the church, peaceful society, and light to the nations.

Among the book's weaknesses is that the authors appear to be in a hurry to conclude the book. The last chapter that should serve as recommendations and benefits for readers after reading through the book was hurriedly written without much explanation. The authors should have devoted more time to expatiating the points raised in the chapter.

The authors attempt to write a scholarly book by citing some scholars, but most of the writing is the authors' personal opinions that are likely to be subjected to debates by experts in conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and even Christian marriage. It would be better if the authors could read more about what experts in these fields have written on the issues raised in the book.

It is evident that the book was written mainly by one of the authors. The second author, a woman, wrote only one chapter, as identified earlier. This makes the chapter written by the woman resemble a disjointed portion of the book. It also renders the book one-sided, as a man's perspective on conflicts in Christian marriage is not specifically presented in the book.

Among the strengths of the book is that it addresses one of the contemporary issues. It is practical in approach. Intending couples will find the book helpful as they prepare for marriage. Likewise, parents, pastors, and marriage counsellors will find the book handy in guiding and counselling couples on how to handle conflicts in their relationships.

In conclusion, the book is well-bounded with a colourful cover. The printing is reader friendly. Therefore, I recommend the book to parents, pastors, marriage counsellors, and most especially intending and married couples.