

GAY MARRIAGE AS A PERVASION OF NATURAL ORDER: BIBLICAL AND SOCIETAL VIEW

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Abstract

The reality of gay life and activities is not in doubt. “Gay” according to Sarason and Sarason (2009), is a term used to describe a homosexual life style by those who feel the term “homosexual” has too many negative connotations (p. 592). In contemporary usages; homosexuals are gay men while their female counterparts are lesbians. The feature of homosexuality is that persons of the same gender are involved in same sex activities such as oral sex, anal intercourse, masturbation and other forms of fondling which have been on the increase and culminating into gay marriages. There is no procreation here which is against the natural order as ordained by God and practiced by human race and invariably in traditional African and Christian marriages. Continuity with their lineage seems compromised. Child adoption seems the best option but the question being raised is whose children would be adopted? In the traditional African society, various cases of sexual deviations were unheard of. This is because Africans value family and their culture which is against gay marriages and gay practices, so they could not allow that. One's problem is another person's concern and they will not like anyone to be in such a problem which will connect everybody. Man is created in the image and likeness of God. The Holy Bible made it clear in Genesis 1:27-28: “so God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created them, male and female, He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it”. From the above scriptural quotations, one can see that it is the will of God for marriage to be between man and woman. In other words, God is in support of heterosexual relationship and not same-sex relationship.

Introduction

In Nigeria, marriage traditionally has been defined as a religious and legal commitment between a man and a woman as well as the ultimate expression of love. Homosexual relationships are increasingly gaining acceptance in this country. However, these couples have not been permitted to marry (openly).

In churches and politics, the debate about homosexuality has focused recently on whether gays should be allowed to marry or whether gay sex should be legal. In most cultures in Nigeria, same-sex relationships, sodomy and the likes are regarded as abominable. Rathus (2005) states that “some gay males and lesbians marry members of the other sex but harbour unfulfilled desires for members of their own sex (p. 293). Most heterosexual Nigerian men are homophobic, that is, they have a deep, morbid, irrational fear of homosexuals.

In Nigeria, although marriage has been declared a “fundamental right”, no state recognizes same-sex marriages. Gay activists claim that gay marriage will help in adopting children. The question is when they finish adopting those children, whose children will they adopt? If all became gay who will procreate? If their parents were all gay will they have come into this world? Therefore, gay marriage should be discouraged. It is a negation to natural order.

Old Testament and Gay Marriage

Accepting the Genesis record, we can see that there was a time when there were no homosexuals. God created Adam and later from his ribs created Eve. When Adam awoke from his deep sleep... there was a woman, not another man but a woman. They became one flesh. From that time on, the natural pattern of things, as God intended them to be, was forever set. If we had no further statements in the scripture regarding homosexuality or heterosexuality or even gay marriage, then this one event alone

would bear out the natural order of the true sexual proclivity.

Since the issue of homosexuality and the right to same-sex union has become a major controversy in our world today the Christian voice is not left out in the debate. But as would be expected, the source of the Christian argument remains the word of God as put together in the scripture. In collaboration to this, Umonen (2013) states:

The Bible as an authentic Christian moral authority does not support homosexuality. This Christian scripture has these to say about homosexuality; (Genesis 19: 1-26, Lev.18:22, Lev 20:12 1cor 6:9-10, Romans 1 26-28).

According to Mosaic Code in the book of Leviticus chapter 18:22; 20:13, it is written:

Nor shall you take a woman as a rival to her sister; to uncover her nakedness while the other is alive... you shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination... if a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman; both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.

From the quotation above, it can be said that the Mosaic Code with its attendant sanctions, can be applied specifically to the Church. Mosaic Code do contain rules, ideas, precepts and guidelines by which we live and which are major doctrines distinctive of the Church. They adopted them not because they are recorded in the Mosaic Code, but because, they are universal and eternal principles governing the relationships of mankind. What this passage does reveal is that homosexuality or gay practices in the Mosaic economy is among those things which God rejects – which, indeed, are an abomination to him.

The mind of God with respect to homosexuality is not confined to this one statement in the Law of Moses; but this statement is in harmony with God's predisposition against homosexuality recorded

in the scriptures.

In Genesis 18 – 19 the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was a well known story from the bible. God had made the decision to destroy the cities because of the enormity of their sins. Because Lot was a righteous man, God sent two angels that disguised as men to rescue Lot and his family from the coming destruction. The way the men of Sodom treated the angels shows their homosexual act. “And they called to Lot and said to him, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them carnally”.

From the above bible passages, the sin in question is certainly homosexual in character. This is because the verb “to know” in this context is to have sexual intercourse with. Secondly, the men of Sodom rejected the virgin daughters of Lot which Lot offered to them

New Testament and Gay Marriage

A historian, John Boswell's detailed research into early and medieval Christianity led him to conclude that up until about the thirteenth century, the Church was relatively neutral toward homosexual behaviour as sinful, did not regard it as any worse than heterosexual transgressions. Boswell found a gay subculture that flourished throughout this period and argues that it was known to the church, that clergy and church officials were often part of it, that it was not infrequently tolerated by religious and civil authorities alike, and that in it same-gender marriages or “unions” occurred (MCNeill, 1980, 1994).

This sort of reinterpretation has led some theologians, such as Roman Catholic John Mc Neill and Anglican Norman Pittenger, to question whether the tradition has been understood properly and to conclude that sexual relationships that are characterized by mutual respect, concern and commitment by love in its fullest sense – are to be valued and affirmed, whatever the gender of the partners.

(Pitenger, 1970, Mc Neill, 1987).

One of the favourite points made by homosexual Christians is that Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. Since the Genesis passages clearly indicate homosexual activity and intentions, it is not difficult to understand the implication of our Lord Jesus when he remarked; "... but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all... (Luke 17:29 (NKJV)). This passage indicates that Jesus understood the wickedness of Sodom and its homosexual wickedness in particular.

St. Paul's view of sexuality and women was ambivalent, deriving both from the immorality of much Greco-Roman culture and from the expectation he shared with most early Christians that Jesus would return soon, bringing the world to an end (Parrinder, 1996).

Paul advocated celibacy, not necessarily because he was opposed to sex but because marriage might prove a distraction from prayer, worship and proclaiming the Gospel. As a Jew, Paul opposed all sexual expression outside marriage, and judged sexual immorality harshly. However, he did not single out sexual sin. In Galatians 5:19-21, he condemned the "sins of the flesh", but by this he meant all aspects, such as immorality, impurity, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like.

Later Christian theologians tended to understand the "sins of the flesh" primarily in sexual terms and this gave Christianity a bias against sexuality beyond what Paul probably intended. Given the times, it is not surprising that the New Testament is ambivalent about sexuality, probably more so than the Old Testament.

One other passage worth mentioning regarding the sin of Sodom is found in the seventh verse of the Epistle of Jude. "As Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of

eternal life”. (Jude 7). From the above passage, if Jude had meant simply rape as some people think to be the only sin of Sodom, adultery and so on, he would have stopped with the inclusive word, immorality, but the phrase gone after strange flesh, set in a sexual context, and given the already demonstrated nature of Sodom's sin, is unmistakable.

“For this reason, God gave them up to vice passions, for even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the women, burned in their lust for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due (Romans 1:26-27 (WKJV)).

“Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers and if these is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine”. (1 Timothy 1:9-1 (BJHV)).

These two references indicate that homosexual passions and acts are unnatural, shameful, contrary to sound doctrine and deny entrance to the kingdom of God. This being so, they cannot be the basis of a Christian marriage sanctioned by God's church. The church exists to save people, not to bless the means of their damnation. No marriage can be sanctioned by the church if the very basis of the marriage involves acts that put the couple outside of eternal salvation. No matter what our society may legislate, the law of God is clear – that a marriage is not a godly marriage if it is a same-sex union.

Homosexuals view this passage of Romans 1:26-27 entirely different. They maintain that this passage has reference to those men who consciously gave up their heterosexuality in favour of homosexuality. They felt it is not speaking of a natural or proclivitic

homosexual. It could be said, they allege, that the principle taught by this passage could be likewise applied to a homosexual, who gave up his natural homosexuality in favour of heterosexuality. Those who do not write Paul off as being hung up sexually, say that in all his writings, Paul does not condemn homosexuality per se, only lust which may be expressed either homosexually or heterosexually. This argument may be ridiculous but viewed from the homosexual perspective, this passage actually supports those homosexuals who claim to be naturally so. They argue that Paul said that if a man esteems something to be sin that for him it is so. In other words, if one is not a homosexual let him not be one but if one is and do not see it as sin let him continue. They see it as interpretation of the Bible.

Dave Richards, Deacon MCC, Los Angeles as quoted by Morris (1978) says

If people would look at gays as being Christians and sons and daughters of God – accept us for what we are – that God loves us as much as he loves them, then, we could have a much, much better united Christian community instead of looking in the Old Testament and other passages and concluding that homosexuality is a sin, Homosexuality is not a sin. That's the way I feel, I feel, I can worship my Lord. I can get down on my knees . . . and when I get to heaven, I just hope that day of rejoicing will be as happy for us then, as is for us now, knowing that we can be accepted by God. (p. 81).

Specifically, what does the Bible say about homosexuality? What are the passages? Perhaps, it would be best to allow the passages to speak for themselves.

Gay Marriage in the Church

The concern of the author at this point is the effects Gay movement/practices has had and is having upon the church at large. This work indicates that probably no church of over 100 members is

without a member being a homosexual. Gay practices have been taking place in most churches without attaching much importance to it. Until recently, when people are more convinced of its sinfulness, those who had homosexual feelings or those who were homosexuals felt deep shame and under no circumstances would they allow their homosexuality to be revealed. They were in the unenviable position of needing the church, and yet not daring to reveal to it his/her deepest need. This reason for this attitude certainly is the fear of condemnation from the leadership and ostracism from the constituency.

Among all Christians, or among those authorized to speak officially for Christians, certain elements of sexual ethics were in the past taken for granted, and the focus was very much on the purpose of sex, what kinds of sexual act were permitted, and in what circumstances. Since sex was ordained by God for the purpose of bringing children into the world, the proper context for it was within marriage, since children needed a loving and stable environment: this was provided by heterosexual marriage, which was for the raising of children and also been instituted by God himself. From this, Hoose (2000) states:

It followed that pre-marital sex or adultery was forbidden. From the fact that God had ordained sex for procreation it also followed that any kind of sexual activity not suitable for the production of children was not only forbidden but perverted the nature of sex itself. Masturbation, contraception, bestiality and anal and oral sex were all in a deep sense contrary to the will of God, since they not only broke the law of God concerning sexual matters, but also struck at the very purpose for which God had created sex.(p.233)

Homosexuality and its acceptance (if accepted) will pose a serious problem to a society predominantly made up of heterosexuals. Many researchers of this subject have concluded that both heterosexuality and homosexuality are learned processes; that our

sexual preference is determined by our conditioning and that either is as natural as the other. Others claim that homosexuality is like being left-handed.

Rowland Macaulay, an inspirational speaker and human rights activist was quoted by Tell December 2011 as having said “we believe in the power of prayer, we must stay on our knees and prevail daily in our prayers”. Macaulay and his congregation have embarked on “operation pray until something happens”, push, and a marathon prayer session aimed at stopping the anti-gay bill in Nigeria.

As a gay pastor, Macaulay and his congregation made up of lesbians, gays, and bisexual Christians feel persecuted in the country. The decision of the Senate to pass the bill prohibiting same-sex marriages and prescribing a 14 (fourteen) year jail term for those contracting such marriages further lends credence to this sledge mentality. The universal fellowship of Metropolitan community churches ordained him reverend in 1998. With headquarters in Los Angeles, the United States, the church is a global and affirming ministry, mostly for lesbian, gay, bisexual and people. Macaulay started the House of Rainbow as a church in 2006 using the premises of the United Bible Universities Church founded by Augustus Macaulay, his father. The church is located at 36/38 Yakoyo Street, Ojodu, Berger, and Lagos. His Ministry that had operated discretely opened a second branch in Jakande Estate, Isolo Lagos while plans were afoot to open other branches in Port Harcourt, Rivers State and Abuja, the Federal Capital territory.

He was quoted by Tell December 26 (2011) as having described the persecution of his religious belief.

We are primarily a Christian group, supporting people of all faiths to reconcile sexuality and spirituality “

By 2008, I became recognized for my work and support for LGBT, (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender Individuals) rights. My life was endangered. I became an

escape goat of the Nigeria media, which published many headlines, with my names, photographs and home address which threatened my safety and incited ordinary citizens to attack me and our members”.

The summary of all that Macaulay was saying was that he was not received in Nigeria. His members were attacked. Even his family members rejected him. He was forced to close the physical presence of his church and he had sought refuge in the United Kingdom. He was in exile and still was bothered about the law passed by the Senate against gay marriage. According to Macaulay, “every fourth night, 50 or so Nigerians furtively log on for an online Bible study class. “This is the only way we can worship because of the stigma,” he said. The reason for the secrecy is that the participants ranging from students to married men are gay. To go to a mainstream church in the country they would risk beatings or even a forced exorcism. So, he says hundreds are turning to House of Rainbow, Nigeria's only gay friendly church, which is flourishing online after almost meeting a violent end four years ago. He was quoted to have said again “My church is a voice of the younger generation of citizens, activists and Diaspora, and our collective belief in a more progressive Nigeria”. He claimed that his church is spreading around the world, reaching out to people who believe in homosexuality and lesbianism. He said 10 (ten) local leaders of the church are in Ghana, Nigeria, UK, Burundi and Lesotho already.

Akinola George, area Pastor of Victory Model Chapel of RCCG, Ketu, Lagos was quoted by Smith (2011) for seeing homosexuality as sin by saying that God is against homosexuality. “It is sacrilegious for a responsible fellow to engage in such an act. In our own African set up, when you talk of homosexuality, it is an abomination, it is unheard of” (p. 62). Such is the view of Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria who insisted that homosexuality is un-African and should not be tolerated on the continent regardless of the arguments of the western countries for the respect of the fundamental human rights of homosexuals.(Smith

2011 p.62)

The dominant role of religion is widely seen as the root of the country's homophobic culture. A considerable number of lesbians and gays have left the established religious organizations and founded their own churches, synagogues, temples and other groups of which according to Hyde (2006) “the largest is the Metropolitan Community Church” (p. 530). Many homosexual persons reject all forms of religion as oppressive and invalid, making religion as controversial within the gay community as homosexuality is within religious bodies.

Two issues in particular seem to provoke most debates: Ordination of Gays and homosexual marriage. In the 1970s, most major American protestant denominations debated the appropriateness of ordaining lesbians and gays to the ministry. The debates were emotional and explosive and nearly all resulted in legislation forbidding homosexual ordination. The debate in 2004 at the General Conference of the United Methodist Church was typical. In a highly charged atmosphere including demonstrations, the group voted by a 2 to 1 margin, that practising homosexuals cannot be ordained and that Methodist Ministers may not bless same-sex unions (Bloom, 2004).

At present, according to Hyde (2006),
only the Unitarian – Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ (Congregationalists) and the American Union of Hebrew Congregations seem willing to ordain gay and lesbian people openly, and the lines are pretty clearly drawn in other religious groups... In 2003, the Episcopal Church amid much controversy approved the consecration as bishop of an openly gay priest (Davey, 2003).

Although the Catholic condemns homosexuality, it holds that the homosexual person may be fully obedient to the will of God, as long as she or he remains abstinent. Hence the, Vatican directive entitled “The Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons states in part:

Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition; lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. (Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith, 1986, p. 379).

What Jesus Taught about homosexuality

And He answered and said to them, have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female? (Matthew 19:4 (NKJV))

But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female (Mark 10:6 (NKJV)).

When Jesus was asked questions about marriage, He went straight back to the defining passages in Genesis that say that marriage is between male and female and is meant to be life long. He saw the creation accounts in Genesis as authoritative in His day. And what is authoritative for Jesus is authoritative for Christians also. While Jesus did not specifically teach on homosexuality, His establishment of the Genesis passages as the fundamental passages are the fundamental passages on marriages (even more fundamental than the law).

It is from the Bible that the church draws her theology and guide for faith and its practice. So if the scriptures address the subject of homosexuality, the church by definition must accord them credibility.

Conclusion

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that does not exist just for the emotional satisfaction of two individuals but for the greater

good of the community which stands under the blessing or curse of God. Societies that put emotional fulfillment before right actions and principles of marriage will soon collapse. God will judge any society that institutes same-sex marriages.

We cannot bend the principles of God's word to suit vocal minority groups. Some nation may enact laws permitting these evils; the true church of God must stand resolutely firm and never allow the sanctioning of same-sex marriages by Christian clergy. No church that takes the Bible seriously can sanction a union between homosexuals or lesbians.

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