

# REEXAMINING HOMOSEXUALITY: AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN ETHICAL RESPONSE

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## Abstract

This article explores the complex interplay surrounding homosexuality within the framework of African Christian ethics. It addresses the discrimination as well as the cultural, theological, and social dimensions influencing attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals in African contexts. The study examined traditional beliefs, scriptural interpretations, and Church traditions against contemporary views. By engaging with African theologians and local communities, the article highlights the tension between cultural conservatism and Church position and tradition on homosexuality. The study advocated for inclusion and acceptance of homosexuals within the Church as it would polygamist. Ultimately, it propose a reconciliatory ethical approach that respects the dignity of homosexuals as God's creatures and those for whom Christ died.

**Keywords:** Homosexual, African Christians, Cultural values, Theology, Morality.

## Introduction

The church, in Africa, is generally slow-motioned in her response to various ethical issues, in spite of civilization and rapid development across the globe, particularly homosexuality. Ethical challenges of this kind, are often kept at the lowest ebb in Africa, because of the people's religion and rigid cultural belief. Because no known cultural value absolutely endorse sexual orientation between same sex, discussions of this nature has been ongoing for long, prior to societal approval, in many nations of the world (including UK, France, Argentina and Belgium (Fani-Kayode, 2013) to name a few), while the church, in Africa seem to leave the issue in the hands of her governments.

The word "homosexuality was first used by Marta Karolyn in Kyunhop (2008). In 1869, while referring to same sex, phenomenon, in some criticism Former, in his view defined a homosexual person as one who feel a strong erotic attraction to another person of the same sex. According to Fromer (1993) the homosexual has the ability to be sexually arouse by members of the same sex, and prefer to engage in sexual activity with members of the same sex. Although the phenomenon is as old as civilization the description is not precise as most people assumed (Roger, 1995). For instance, Field ((1995) said, homosexuality is ambivalent in the sense that it may apply to various kind of people based on personal orientation and behaviors. This is the case with the "yan daudu" described by Azuah in Nigeria. Homosexuals, in this case, rather than being people in same sex sexual practice, are mainly people in the same sex relationship or marriage.

Kunhiyop (2008) said one of the African ethicists, while describing homosexuality (as involvement of sexual attraction to those of the same sex), identified two bi-functional groups which are the constitutional and situational nature, in the sense that they have not chosen to be homosexual; but instinctively found themselves inclined. Supporting this view, Crook also described the groups as the pervert, and Invert groups. While the pervert occasionally indulges in homosexual act, the invert genuinely practices homosexuality (Roger, 1995). Both groups though medically and psychologically proved are characterized by lot of the scientific arguments, and speculation the resulting disagreements are now without ethical and implicational inferences.

In general, however, homosexuality is defined as the acts of feeling and engaging in sexual activity with a person of same gender. Also, writing on homosexuality, Alan Bell (2016) postulated that the homosexual experience is so diverse that the word homosexuality is used as a kind of umbrella terms the branches, under this umbrella include lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender, coined as LGBT. This paper work stick to using the word homosexual, while referring to any of the of the LGBT condition the word LGBT conditions. Lesbianism, White (2001), describes female homosexuality; while (particularly on gay and lesbian) describing male to male, and female to female sexual relationship respectively. Homosexuals are found in every racial, cultural, religious, socioeconomic groups including the most culturally conservative Africa, especially Nigeria, homosexuality is relatively unaccepted and adherents are avoided with disdain. However, it is obvious that African particularly the church, can no longer avoid the issue of homosexuality which is fast creeping into the society.

In an article titled "Homosexual Pastor Docked for Having Sex with Church Members," the founder and General Overseer of Pentecostal church, was said to have been remanded at the Federal Medium Security Prison on homosexual allegation. This happen following his confession to the act, with a young boy, who swore oath of secrecy with him in the church. The Nigerian law says, that such act of sexual activity was indecent and punishable under section 214(1) 353 of the constitution of Nigeria. In a similar posting, another incidence; "Rise of homosexuality in Nigeria: Molestation no Longer Gender Specific" (Field, 1995) alerted that there is an incessant increase homosexual affiliations in the society, and that it cuts across gender preferences.

The position of the church, in Africa, has always been against homosexuality. It is doubly unacceptable, from cultural and religious perspectives. If many nations in Africa are beginning to tilt toward accepting homosexuality, as an appropriate alternative lifestyle, the church must not fold her arms: The church should begin to be concern and respond appropriately. The issue should not be left only at the discretion of political leaders, or national government

### **African Traditional and Contemporary Views of Homosexuality**

In most parts of Africa, homosexual acts are not morally acceptable; and as such should not be mentioned in public. It is viewed perversion of morally acceptable marriage patterns which if discovered would best be described as one of the "world turning upside down phenomenon. Homosexuality is perceived as a cultural value

distortion, because it lacks the basic intention of sexual union, which is for procreation. Eugene (2013), affirmed that "little more than anecdotal attention is paid to departures from procreative sexual practices, in traditional [African] cultures." He went further to say that little more than a footnote is allocated to any discussion of homosexuality in Africa (Eugene, 2013).

On the other hand, there are claims that, traditionally, some African societies actually endorse homosexual practice, but not openly. Azuah (2013), claims that same sex sexual relationships are found in some parts of Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Zimbabwe. Also, Azuah supported the claim, that homosexuality is not foreign to Africa, opining that same sex relationships existed in pre-Colonial Nigeria among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria. In this culture, the issue is not necessarily homosexuality per se, but that of same sex marriage, because the purpose is not for satisfying sexual urge but to ensure the perpetuation of the family lineage. Azuah (2013), explained that, in this situation, women marry women, an only child could choose to marry a woman to have children, so she could keep her father's lineage. She arranges with her 'wife' to have sex outside, and have children with a man outside of their marriage, for the purpose of procreation (Azuah).

In the Northern part of Nigeria, the "yan daudu" were male prostitutes who came out annually in a cultural festival dance in the open (Kunhiyop, 2008), Party organizers hired them as entertainment crew for their guests, because they dressed, and performed roles and acts considered traditionally to be women's. Azuah (2013), calling them "dan daudu" saw them as having acceptance within their culture, until the arrival of Sharia law in 1999.

Many African leaders oppose acts of homosexuality. Daniel Arap Moi, the former president of Kenya in his own view said that homosexuality is against African norms; traditional and even religious (Kunhiyop, 2008). He went further to say that it is considered a menace which is counter to. Christian teachings in Africa; and therefore, a great sin. Similarly, John Atta of Ghana extrapolated that "I will never initiate or support any attempt to legalize homosexuality in Ghana President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe seriously campaigning against sets of homosexuals. Quoted by Kunhiyop, the President said, "I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organizations, like those of homosexuals, who offend against the law nature and the morals of religious belief (backed by our society) should have any advocate in our midst or even elsewhere in the world (Kunhiyop, 2008).

According to Smith and Mapondera (2012), in a constitutional review conducted in Zimbabwe, the president declared that Zimbabwe would not give in to any international pressure, or influence, to compromise on the issue of homosexuality. Also in Malawi, late president Bingu wa Mutharika, while pardoning on humanitarian ground a same sex couple, following their engagement said, they had "committed a crime against our culture, our religion, and against our laws;"

In the contemporary African societies, however, homosexuality discussions are gaining ground. For instance, the Nigerian society was mostly heterosexually inclined Minority sexuality such as LGBT, was neither cultural nor

religiously recognized. In the early decade of the 21 century, however, homosexuality was no more a taboo and Nigerians are no more plagued with avoidance, on the issues of homosexuality South Africa tops the list of homosexual liberalism in Africa, and the act has come to be accepted as a norm in many parts of Africa Kenya is one of such African countries, where homosexuality is criminalized. This act of intolerance is written in the Kenya constitution, as a criminal offence, with life imprisonment as penalty, (government questionnaire: united nation study on violence against children 34)

### **Biblical View of Homosexuality**

Most Christians, or church bodies, believe that homosexuality is Christian culture. Initially, the few church denominations, which endorsed homosexuality such as the Metropolitan Community Church. The United Church of Christ, and (partially) the Episcopal Church: all in America, did so to accept members; but, not to permit church leaders. The involvement of priests, accused of paedophiles and similar scandals, spurred the church globally to taking homosexual issue as a challenge.

The Bible clearly teaches that homosexuality is not compatible with God's plan for humanity. There are many biblical references showing that God ordained and approved the heterosexual act, within the union of marriage, which are not in homosexual activity. The relatively few biblical passages, dealing with the subject, do not treat homosexuality as a psychosexual orientation, but rather refer to certain types of homosexual acts. The major references completely condemn same-sex genital expression.

Beginning with the creation account, sexual activity was obviously between opposite sexes. Geisler (2003), noted that the first human beings were made male and female the primary purposes of creating Adam and Eve include, for taking care of other creation, and for procreation obviously, a homosexual union is not able to fulfil this latter purpose as it has been in creation. God's creation of male and female, and the heterosexuality, and not homosexuality (Gen 1:27-28). God declared that all God made were good. That human beings are made in the image of God, means that they are good; and, therefore, should not partake in anything that will distort that image of God, which is good.

The Old Testament narrates the judgement passed against Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 & 19. Sodomy is an indication of the sin that characterized the city. The demand for the men, for the purpose of illicit sex, was a reason for the destruction of the city (Shields, 2004). The people were condemned and destroyed by God, because of their unrepentant hearts, in the sin of homosexuality. This given as a warning for people of all ages, that God holds homosexuality fully accountable for their sins (Kraus, n.d). Also in Leviticus, the Bible speaks against illicit sexual union, among which are same sex sexual acts. Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman that is detestable (18. 22, NIV) this act is punishable by death, as shown in Lev 20:13 if a man lies with a man, both of them have done detestable they must be put to death their blood will be on their own hands (NIV).

In the New Testament two biblical references distinctively speak against homosexual practice as unnatural, and incompatible with the lifestyle of God's kingdom it is also an affront to God's law, and the Gospel. For instance in romans, Paul writes'.... Even their women exchange natural relationship for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural committed indecent act with other men, and receive in themselves the due penalty for their perversion'', and received in themselves shed (Romans 1:26-27, NIV) to expose the gentile world's guilt before a holy God and focuses on their arrogance and shameful lust, Rather than follow God's instructions in their lives. They suppressed righteousness, for instructions in their lives, they suppressed righteousness, and followed passions that dishonour God (Wright, 1993).

The various arguments (put up against this biblical injunction, to justify homosexuality, and challenge this traditional conclusion that homosexuality is a sin) could not hold because the choice of words in the Bible text, is clearly spelt, to paint homosexuality as a vice. This what Wright Said;

“Generally, Paul could not have envisaged, some facets of contemporary debates, such as 'monogamous same-sex relationships, between persons of homosexual preference. It is nevertheless a safe conclusion that, whatever might be said about individual orientations or dispositions, Paul could only have regarded all homosexuals' erotic and genital behaviours as contrary to the creator's plan for human life, to be abandoned on conversion

Further in 1Corinthians, God will not quality homosexuals, those who will inherit God's kingdom. "Do you not know that wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male drunkards,, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor ands, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. (1Corinthians 6:9 & 10. NIV) The Church is to declare that biblical injunctions are for all human being because they are made by God in God's image and Christian morals are His prescription and His loving command, for all intelligent creatures (Clark, 1996).

All along, the Church in Africa has taken a bold stance against homosexuality. This was first demonstrated publicly by the team from Nigeria at Zanzibar in 2007. Led by the Revd. Peter Akinola, the team conservative archbishops refused to take communion, with Katherine Jeffers and the leaders of American Episcopalian. This was in protest of the election of a gay Bishop, Gene Robinson, by the Episcopal Church the United States of America: Since the said election in 2003, the Methodist Church in Nigeria has disagreed and dissociated herself from the act.

### **Divergence in Contemporary African Society and Church Perspectives**

Homosexuality is no more a taboo, in the twenty-first century African society, with the rise in education, globalization, and fast information technology. Many communities in Africa are abandoning their traditional ideas of the family relationships, and are moving toward unusual cultural values and patterns. The pace, at which the issue of homosexuality is creeping into Africa, is becoming alarming: and poses a huge challenge to the Church.

In a Wikipedia posting, thirteen countries in Africa have either legalized, or have no laws pertaining to it. South Africa is the most liberal in the former category, having constitutions which guarantee legal rights, and same-sex marriage. For instance, following the death of her predecessor, Joyce Banda, (the president of Malawi) pledged to lift the country's ban on homosexuality. This step is described as a step in breaking ranks (Smith and Mapondera, 2012), from much of Africa, where the act is condemned.

A number of reasons are responsible for this shift of position and belief; some of which include, a search for international acceptance and recognition, on the part of government. The Malawian experience, for instance has a note of compromise; which was obvious, president Joyce Banda claimed her decision was mad, because her government wanted to normalize relations with our traditional development partners, who were uncomfortable with our bad laws although unacceptable in Nigeria, homosexual issues are gradually coming into the lime-light. While many are opposed to the practice, a few are agitating for its legitimacy. Some factors that account for the sudden change, including the following:

1. Quest for recognition and acceptance. Homosexuals want to be heard. They want to enjoy every right to live, and to be accepted in the society. Morton, quoted by Crook, said people avoid and exclude homosexuals. They also whisper, or joke about them; staring at them with hostility (Smith and Mapondera, 2012). Africans would refuse to have anything to do with a known homosexual; neither would he/she be welcome in a church.
2. Dogmatism, giving room for renaissance, is a factor in this discussion. Increase in the level of education, and exposure, create the desire for morality to be based on empirical and scientific data rather than traditional normative dictate of a culture. Development in scientific research and information technology, have created an influx of various kinds of knowledge to the people. The implication is that certain knowledge becomes appealing. Also, psychological and empirical data have replaced traditional authority and religious conviction (Smith and Mapondera, 2012).
3. Erosion and abandonment of traditional values and beliefs (Smith and Mapondera, 2012), are also contributory factors, western cultural influences have always been strong, generally in African nations, and foreign cultural practices are considered more appealing especially to the new generation. As new generations of Africans reject traditional beliefs and practices, as backward and unacceptable, the communities (which used to be the arbiter of morality) are no longer seen as authoritative (Smith and Mapondera, 2012), therefore, issues such as homosexual practices creep in.

The most pathetic, and challenging (of the divergence from what Africans and the church considered as regular), is the rejection of biblical revelation and ecclesiastical faith and practices. People's world view is no longer shaped by scripture and the church. Instead, it is shaped by secular, humanistic thinking, which singled out 'erotic' love



as the most important factors in marriage, thereby regarding homosexuality as irrelevant (Smith and Mapondera, 2012)'

No doubt, a lot of change are happening around us, in African societies, calling on the church for responds. The church must be able to maintain its stance, in the line with the scripture, on the issue on homosexuality. The church can do so, and be faithful to its calling, only when it maintains the authority of the bible, as the revelation of God's norms for his people (Guenther, 1999).

### **Ethical Approach from Church Perspectives**

The morality, of homosexuality practices, poses a great threat to our society; and imposes critical challenges to the church in Africa. While homosexual, across the globe (in other parts of the world) are gaining more acceptance and recognition, their counterparts in Africa continually their sympathy and support. This may not linger o much longer. Reasons, why the move for acceptance may be faster than anticipated, include some of which government policies would likely favour by accepting homosexuals legally, as it happened with President Joyce Banda of Malawi, mentioned earlier.

The church is already behind, in the conversation regarding homosexual issues. If such thing will be happening, the church may be caught as too sullen. The implications, of folding arms, include that teaching of Christian moral standards (and, of course, the gospel in homes, school and the general public) would be at stake. What then should the church do& would the church, in Africa, see the homosexual issues as another challenges, in the trends of her history (such as having a bearing to polygamy versus monogamy(, whereby culture matches biblical injunction&, or would the church embrace, an evil culture, whsich is not biblically rooted; in the name of 'development' or for the sake of obeying all political authorities and societal agreement& in any case, the church must arise to declare God's purpose, for human-kind, through the scriptures, by first identifying her position on this issue.

### **Recommendations for the church in African**

The following are postulated for consideration that:

The church, in Africa, must maintain the biblical stand of frowning at the practice of homosexuality. The church is not to bend towards the approval of such a practice, which the bible (which is the basis of her authority) disapproves. In this way, the church would affirm, and hold fast to the truth of the word of God without compromise. However, as it is with the polygamy issue, the church should accept homosexuality as she would accept the polygamist. The church would always affirm that God loves everyone, even when they were in sin; The position of the Nigerian Baptist convention comes to mind here for many years, polygamist were excluded from partaking in some ordinances of the church, such as baptism, and the lord's supper. While they were also to be excluded from holding leadership position in the church, some were serving as church leaders, especially in the rural areas. In many instance, polygamist church-leaders, in rural areas were instrument to the planting of such churches. Exclusion from these Eucharist duties continued until the Ilorin 2001 convention in session. The

admittance of polygamists, into partaking in baptism and the Lord's Supper, was not to remove the fact that the church disapproves and discourages the act; but it was to prioritize the need of the believer over marital status. The following are the recommendations of the ministerial board, who sat on the matter coined from the 2001 book of reports for the 88<sup>th</sup> annual session in Ilorin, that;

1. The need of newly evangelized persons for the ordinances, should take priority over marital status. Therefore, no person (including polygamist) who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ should be denied baptism, church membership and participation in the Lord's Supper.
2. No member of the church, who is polygamist, should hold a church office or position. (This means the pastoral and diaconate offices.)
3. Any office holder, who becomes a polygamist should be relieved of such an office with immediate effect without fear or favour.
4. Those polygamist should be evangelized and accepted with hope that the gospel, like a leaven, will effect a general change in the culture towards the Christians ideal and those who are yet polygamist should be forbidden from becoming so.
5. The church should think of other method of upholding monogamy, as the ideal without disobeying the express command of the lord, to baptize those who believe. For example, pastors and the church leaders should be encouraged to hold frequent marriage seminars and workshops, to uphold the idea of Christian marriage (NBC, book of Report, 2001).

The dangers., in excluding" homosexuals from church lie in blocking the avenue for them to receive sound biblical teaching which sold help them have experience of conversion; and also preventing them from being eventually useful members of the body of Christ. The various ministries of the church, (through mission activities and social ministries of the church) can create opportunities, for homosexual to be reached with the truth of the word of God.

Another similar issue on sexuality which the church has been able to handle, is that of adultery. The scripture clearly speaks against adultery, and so does the church. However, many adulterers (and sometimes church leaders) parade our churches, and yet the church has always found a place for them with conditions such as providing room for repentance or, with the hope that they would repent. As it is with every sinner, the church must pursue things that would help the sinner come to repentance, by accepting the love of Christ. This means that the church should be willing to be God's agent for the reclaiming of the sinner.

The secular educational arm of the church should be fortified with sound moral teachings, to meet children and youth needs. The contemporary youth is such that is overly exposed through information & Communication Technology (ICT), to many things. Unless thorough teaching of the word of God is incorporated into their secular educational system, youths and children would be misform on the issue of homosexuality, and they would be



overly expose and indulge in the practice. Youths should be made to understand potential threats and dangers posed by their indulging in homosexual practices. The danger inculcates such, affecting self and relationship between others and with God;

In situations where other religious affiliations would not permit the use of the Bible, the church can still respond to the problem of homosexuality in Africa. The church in this experience, may approach the teaching of biblical truth, from morality perspective in a context way. Through music, drama, writings, artistic expressions, and similar demonstrations, biblical truths are made to be real to people, in their own world and views; thereby, understanding the truth and accepting would be a lot easier. There is need for the church to revive the moral values that the African society is known for, by placing much emphasis on the moral messages, and teachings, Church schools should develop a curriculum to communicate ethical demands, and moral expectations with sound religious tones.

### Conclusion

The rate at which homosexual affiliations is creeping into Africa, warrants that the church should be more open in the discussion on issues of homosexuality, However, all dialogue should be carefully driven, to not allow for compromise of the authority of the Bible, Openness here means the recognition that all human beings are sinners, who need justification by faith. No sin is greater than another, by biblical standards. Therefore, if other sinners (including liars, and other forms of sexual sins, such as adultery and fornication) are accepted in the church, homosexuals who are willing to mend their ways should be welcome in the church. Also, avoidance of compromise implies ethical standards expected of church leaders should be upheld at all levels.

The homosexual is a neighbour, for which the love of God (demonstrated through Christ) it is meant. Jesus as the issue of polygamy versus monogamy has been handled by the church, and adulterers and fornicators are given avenue to understand and accept scripture's injunction by the church, the church in Africa should (in fairness) stand on what she holds as culturally ideal and biblically true, and continue to speak against the practice; while not sending them away either.

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