

Debates on Gay Marriage

by

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Abstract

In Nigeria, marriage traditionally has been defined as a religious and legal commitment between a man and a woman with the ultimate expression of love. It has never been between man and man or between two women with the intent of having sex. Unfortunately, homosexual relationships are increasingly gaining acceptance in this country hence this research work. Though, gay marriages have not been permitted to be carried out (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. Most heterosexual Nigerian men are homophobic, that is, they have a deep, morbid, irrational fear of homosexuals. Its expression ranges from locker room jokes to verbal abuse, to physical assaults that sometimes end in murder. Even men who by intelligence and education should know better may think that homosexuality is a disease or a form of insanity, or the result of a birth injury, or a matter of choice', that gay men routinely molest children are united in some kind of fiendish conspiracy and wear gowns". (p. 19). From Much more explanation, some heterosexual men who are not hung up about gayness may fear guilt by association if they are known to be friends with someone who is gay.

Introduction

In Nigeria, especially in Igbo communities, gay practice is seen as an alien importation and it is viewed as a grave offence. In the past, it did attract capital punishment, as the tradition of the people abhors it. Up till now, the practice is regarded as an abominable act which defiles the land and invites colossal tragedies on the people for the community where it is practised.

Many insist that the act runs contrary to natural causes and can release the wrath of the gods and even the Christian God on man. That was why anyone caught indulging in the act is accused of breaking the law of God and man. Some communities judge the culprit as unfit to live. Example is Moslem community.

In Nigeria, the way same-sex marriage is seen and interpreted in the past is the same way it is seen today. Members of the community are united in their belief that the act is evil. They believe it is one of those bad influences on African way of life brought about by the Europeans during the colonial era. But over time, the church, tradition, government, and the people have joined forces in condemning the act not only in the east but also in other parts of the country.

It would be recalled that the church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) in 2007, strongly opposed to homosexual practice and distanced herself from the stand of the United States of America's Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada, which accepted the union of

same sex. The Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion Nigeria), Nicholas Okoh who was enraged over the stand of the foreign churches said that the Nigeria church would not walk away from the Biblical paths in which Anglican Church walks.

Five years after he made the stance of the Nigerian church known, the Primate still maintained his stand on the matter recently when he applauded the Nigerian Senate for throwing out a law on December 2011, in support of same-sex marriage. He said, recognizing the rights of homosexuals were an aberration.

It would be recalled that the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria approved a penalty of 14 year imprisonment against anyone convicted of homosexuality and 10 years for anybody abetting it. God created the world and told us how we should marry, but some people chose their own way. Their own way is against the will of God for man and it is a negation of natural order hence, this research with the intent to bring to light, the evil associated with their free choice to same-sex marriage and its practises

Debate on Gay practises

There is no doubt that homosexual relationships do exist. Homosexuality is mentioned here because of its own contribution in the gay world experiences. It is interesting to note that the Judeo-Christian scriptures have not let this aspect of the homosexual life go unnoticed. As it is written in the book of Genesis 19:4-9,

...the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house. 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." So Lot went to them through the door way, shut the door behind him, and said, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly." "See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men; since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof". And they said, "Stand back". Then they said, "This one came in to stay here, and he keeps acting as a judge, now we will deal worse with you than with them". So they pressed hard against the man Lot and came near to break down the door.

Ogunbayo (2011) narrated the activities going on in a guest house which is situated off the major Lagos highway in Abule Egba. According to her:

The highly walled guest house is rallying point for many events in the big and thriving underground gay movement in Nigeria. It has witnessed much solemnization of same-sex unions. Just as marriages are contracted in the open world, gay clerics among them conduct marriages for same sex couples. "One Pastor Rowland Jude Macaulay is one of the homosexual Pastors conducting such marriages" (p. 44). Example is church of Rainbow in Lagos.

The secret gay marriage ceremonies often conducted at the guest house, were witnessed by other gay people with or without their partners and are often. However, she continued:

There is no open marriage between a Nigerian couples yet apart from that done by the daughter of General Ishaga Bamaïyi, who is currently married to her lover in US. She met

her “wife” i.e. her gay partner when they were students at Queen’s College Lagos and later married her after many years they lost contact. P. 45).

Many gay Nigerian women and men pretend to be heterosexual in marriages while they are simultaneously married to their gay lovers. That is to say that they have extra marital affairs with their fellow gay and at the same time keep their heterosexual marriage. This however, will make them not to fulfill their obligations in the heterosexual marriage since they cannot serve two masters and serve them well.

Men find it fashionable to belong to a group of men who do not only specialize in having anal intercourse with their fellow men but also press for the legalization of the same sex marriage in Nigeria. This seems a new dimension to gay relationships existing before same-sex marriage which is a foreign impact on Nigerian family system.

Same-sex marriage has been variously argued as inhuman, barbaric, anti-social, immoral and ungodly. It is said to be another dimension in promoting sexual immorality such as rape, incest, adultery and fornication. Man has through same-sex marriage fuelled the idea that he is a corruption of the good plans of God for marriage.

Debates on Why Homosexuals do not open up

According to Morris (1978):

Those who had homosexual feelings or those who were active homosexuals felt deep shame, and under no circumstances would they allow their homosexuality to be revealed. They were (and many still are) in the unenviable position of needing the church, and yet not daring to reveal to it his/her deepest need. The reason for this attitude obviously, is the fear of condemnation from the leadership and ostracism from the constituency (p.27).

Perry (1972) affirms that

Most organized religions have been no more helpful to us than an empty well, to which we have all returned again and again in some kind of forlorn spirit of hope. We who committed ourselves to a homosexual existence grew gradually to accept a feeling that God did not care about us (p. 5).

The shame of homosexuality is far exceeded in Perry’s view by the shame of failure to love. It is only through realizing this that the church can really begin to hold out hope. I do not agree with Rev. Perry’s position relative to God’s creation of and acceptance of homosexuality; but my feelings certainly identify with his sense of rejection. It is really too bad as expressed by Morris (1998) “that we Christians who are supposed to be characterized indeed, known by our love and Christ- like acceptance of people with all their sins, are so prone to reject not only the problems people have, but the people themselves”. (p. 27). Morris (1978) reports that “Tony Perry has since founded a church for homosexuals which, have mushroomed into a denomination” (p. 27).

Curry (1993) quotes the United States Supreme Court as having declared marriage in 1978 to be of fundamental importance to all individuals. “That case, the court described marriage as “one of the basic civil rights of man” and “the most important relation in life”. The court also

noted that “the right to marry is part of the fundamental right to privacy” in the U.S. Constitution. The court hold:

We deal with a right of privacy older than Bill of rights – older than our political parties, older than our school system, marriage is a coming together for better or worse, hopefully enduring and intimate to the degree of being sacred. It is an association that promotes a way of life, not causes a harmony in living, not political faiths; a bilateral loyalty, not commercial or social projects (pp. 1-2).

This time, however few couples are applying to the state for marriage licenses; instead they are participating in their own ceremonies, sanctioned by their friends, families and spiritual communities. In Nigeria, there is no law backing gay marriage. Rather the law is in favour of heterosexual life. For many according to Curry (1993)

The right to marry is a basic civil right – as long as lesbians and gay men are denied the right to marry their lovers, they will be considered second-class citizens. And as long as society offers benefits based on the status of marriage, then lesbian and gay couples want their fair share (pp. 1-2).

In Nigeria, although marriage has been declared a “fundamental right”, no state recognizes same-sex marriages. Some countries for example Denmark and Norway recognizes gay marriage but only if at least one partner is a Danish or Norwegian citizen. Curry (1993) quotes Zablock, (1978) by giving the following examples indicating that Texas “may not issue marriage license for marriage of persons of the same sex. In Florida ‘no country clerk... shall issue a license for ... marriage unless one party is male and the other party is female,’ and in California “marriage is a personal relation arising out of a civil contract between a man and a woman”. Most state laws, however, neither prohibit same-sex marriages, nor include the kind of restrictions Florida and California have” (pp. 1-3).

Hyde (2006) reports that

A considerable number of lesbians and gays have simply left the established religious organizations and founded their own churches, synagogues, temple and other groups of which the largest is the metropolitan community church. On the other hand, 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 (p. 530).

In Nigeria, we have Pastor Marculry having his own church in Lagos named House of Rainbow. He was reported to have been threatening to come back to Nigeria in full force to gain more members. Two issues in particular seem to provoke much debate: ordination and the marriage of homo-sexual people. Beginning in the 1970s, most major American protestant denominations debated the appropriateness of ordaining lesbians and gays to the ministry. The debate was emotional and explosive and nearly all resulted in legislation forbidding homosexual ordination. The debate in 2004 as reported by Bloom at the General Conference of the United Methodist church was typical. In a highly charged atmosphere including demonstrations, the group voted a 2 to 1 margin, that one practising homosexuals “cannot be ordained and that Methodist – Ministers, may not bless same – sex unions” (Bloom 2004).

According to Hyde (2006) “at present only the Unitarian – Universalist Association, the United Church of Christ (Congregationalist), 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” (p. 530). In 2003, the Episcopal Church amid much controversy approved the consecration as bishop of an openly gay priest (Davey 2003).

Many who favour full acceptance of homosexual persons have argued for formal recognition of committed relationships along the lines of marriage. In 2000, American Reform Jewish Rabbis approved of such unions and authorized the development of an appropriate ceremony (Hawes 2002). The United church of Christ blesses same-sex unions. Several other mainline protestant groups, such as the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and ELCA Lutherans, are actively debating and studying the question” (Davey 2003).

Lots of lesbian and gay men change their names. According to Curry (1993) “gay and lesbian partners in a couple sometimes hyphenate their names or choose a name that is the combination of the two, by given examples: Audry Berman and Sheila Gander became Audrey and Sheila Berman Jim Dykes take their lover’s last names. Reverend Jim Dykes and his lover affirmed their commitment and they decided to symbolize that commitment by sharing the same last name”. (p. 254).

Debate on Reasons for denying marriage to Gay couples

The main reason for denying marriage to gay couples is that all major religions consider homosexuality a sin. However, according to Joe, (2011) <http://www.balancedpolitics.org/samesexmarriages.htm>... the first Amendment of the American Constitution clearly states that a person’s religious views or lack thereof must be protected. Marriage by the state is a secular activity; the government cannot start making law, just because a religion says they should”. In stating people’s argument in support of gay marriage, he has this to say, Gay marriage hurts no one hence a marriage is a relationship between two people. However does it hurt society or people not involved in the marriage? It is a personal commitment that really is, no one else’s business. Society shouldn’t be dictating what two people can or can’t do when no one else is hurt in the process. If the church or certain groups disapprove, that’s their right, but it isn’t their right to stop it. The argument continued thus; since gay couples cannot have kids naturally, this will likely increase the desire to adopt. Since there are so many kids around the country in need of adoption, this is a good thing. That marriage encourages people to settle down and to give up that type of lifestyle. Married people commit themselves to one partner and work to build a life together.

Joe also presents some argument against gay marriage thus:

- A law allowing gay marriage would increase the number of non-serious marriages: marriage is the most sacred institutions in this country and every society considers it the joining of a man and a woman. It makes biological sense since only a man and woman can procreate.

- The building blocks of our society and the thing that makes it strong is the traditional family of man, woman and children. The main reason our culture and values have started to crumble is the weakening of families. Introducing another firm of ‘family’ would only make the situation worse.

-Gay rights activists claim that these marriages should be allowed because it doesn't hurt anyone, but it could start a chain reaction that destroys the whole idea of marriage. If someone wants to marry his dog, why shouldn't he be able to, what if someone wants to marry their brother or parent? Etc. Unless we develop some from definition of what a marriage is, the options are endless.

- Children learn about expectations and gender roles from society, It's difficult to teach the importance and traditions of the family when such confusion is thrust upon them. Only a man and woman can bear children, and for thousands of years, a man and woman... headed household has carried generations of people through life".

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

Conclusion

This research noted that though Christians frowned at gay marriage and gay practices, some people in the church are still practicing it. It was discovered that some have dual marriage; heterosexual marriage and gay marriage which they do in secret in our big towns like Kano where they have bar bashing. This contributed to many broken homes as a result of a spouse not meeting up and satisfying his spouse sexually and otherwise. The research concludes that gay marriage and its practices help to increase chronic diseases, such as AIDS, and make people (gays) satisfy their sexual urge in an abominable way thereby incurring the anger of God. It therefore, calls for an urgent attention to the recommendations in order to correct the observed evil.

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