Catholic Moral Theology and Igbo Cultural Ethics on Homosexuality in The Diocese of Nnewi

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Abstract
This article interrogates the moral and theological illegitimacy of homosexuality within the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi in southeastern Nigeria, taking as its animating occasion a pastoral encounter of striking moral significance. During fieldwork within the Diocese, the researcher witnessed a Catholic mother who presented herself before the Seminary authorities not in shame or contrition, but in defense of her son who had been expelled for committing homosexual acts against younger students in a minor seminary. Her argument, that personal freedom in matters of sexuality is as inviolable as freedom of worship, represents what this article describes as a moral decadence of the highest order, the replacement of a formed conscience with a irresponsible liberty as against freedom with responsibility. The article anchors its theological argument in paragraph 2357 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and develops its moral case from within the framework of Catholic moral theology and the cosmological ethics of the Nnewi Igbo community, demonstrating that homosexual acts are condemned simultaneously by divine moral law, by the deepest structures of Igbo communal life, and by the civil law of the Nigerian state. The article advances the concept of total moral illegitimacy and closes with pastoral and institutional recommendations for the Diocese, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, and future scholarship in African moral theology.

Key words: Homosexuality; CCC 2357; Diocese of Nnewi; Igbo cultural ethics; moral theology; *aru*; *nso ani*; moral inversion

1.0 Introduction

There are moments in pastoral ministry that refuse to be filed away neatly among the ordinary difficulties of priestly life. They press upon the conscience of the theologian with an insistence that demands not merely a pastoral response but a scholarly reckoning. The encounter that occasions this article is precisely such a moment. In the course of fieldwork conducted within the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi in southeastern Nigeria, the researcher came face to face with a scene whose surface details were unremarkable but whose

theological and cultural depths were alarming. A Catholic mother appeared before the authorities of a minor seminary in the Diocese to contest the expulsion of her son. The expulsion had been carried out on grounds that were, by any measure of Catholic moral teaching and Igbo community ethics, entirely justified: the boy had engaged in homosexual acts with fellow students and had, with calculated deliberateness, introduced younger and more vulnerable boys into those same acts.

What followed the mother's appearance was not what the institution had any reason to expect. She did not come bearing the posture of a mother wounded by her son's failure and seeking to understand what had gone wrong. She did not express remorse, nor did she acknowledge the gravity of what her son had done to his victims. She came, instead, with an argument. She argued, with a confidence that the researcher found both remarkable and theologically disturbing, that her son had done nothing wrong in any meaningful sense because he had simply exercised his freedom. Her reasoning was arresting in its audacity: just as the Nigerian constitution and the universal tradition of human rights guarantee freedom of worship, she contended, so too must there be a corresponding freedom of sexual action. The seminary's expulsion of her son was, in her framing, not a defense of moral order but a violation of personal liberty.

This article takes that argument seriously enough to dismantle it with the full weight of Catholic moral theology and Igbo cultural ethics. The mother's confident advocacy was not merely an intellectual error, though it was certainly that. It was a symptom of something more deeply troubling: the gradual erosion of the moral imagination of a community that has historically been held firm by the convergent authority of the Catholic faith and the Igbo cosmological tradition. When a woman who has been formed within both of these traditions can stand before ecclesiastical authority and defend homosexual conduct without apparent discomfort, the theologian is confronted with a pastoral emergency of the first order. This article is a response to that emergency.

The theological anchor of the article is paragraph 2357 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which declares that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered, contrary to the natural law, and can under no circumstances be approved. From that magisterial foundation, the article draws its argument through three concentric zones of reinforcing moral authority: the Catholic moral theological tradition that gives CCC 2357 its doctrinal substance; the Igbo cultural and cosmological ethics of the Nnewi community, which arrives at a convergent verdict through the logic of *aru* and *nso ani*; and the civil law of the Nigerian state as codified in the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014. The convergence of all three in a single and unequivocal condemnation of homosexual acts constitutes what this article designates the total moral illegitimacy of homosexuality in the Diocese of Nnewi.

The article proceeds through five sections. Section 2 reads CCC 2357 with the care it deserves and situates it within the tradition of Catholic moral theology on the nature of intrinsic evil and the theology of human sexuality. Section 3 engages the Igbo cultural and cosmological ethics of Nnewi, mapping its understanding of sexual deviance, communal abomination, and the moral obligations of the family. Section 4 examines the mother's argument in its full theological and cultural context and demonstrates the multiple dimensions of its failure. Section 5 analyzes the Nigerian civil and canonical legal frameworks that independently confirm the verdict of the moral and cultural traditions. Section 6 offers conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 The Moral Theological Foundation

2.1 The Text and Its Theological Weight

Paragraph 2357 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is among the most carefully drafted and theologically precise statements in the entire document. It reads: "Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved" (*Catechism* 2357). Every phrase in this text carries doctrinal weight that is worth unpacking with care, because it is the precision of the text that makes it so devastating a response to the kind of argument the mother advanced before the seminary authorities in Nnewi.

The declaration that homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered" is a claim of the highest moral-theological seriousness. In Catholic moral theology, the category of intrinsic evil or intrinsic disorder designates acts whose wrongness does not arise from circumstance, intention, or cultural context but is inscribed in the very structure of the act itself. This is the distinction that the tradition draws between acts that are wrong because of how, when, or why they are done, and acts that are wrong in their very nature, regardless of any surrounding factor. Intrinsically disordered acts cannot be rendered morally acceptable by sincere intention, by cultural permission, by legal authorization, or by any appeal to personal freedom. The *Catechism* places homosexual acts in this category with unmistakable clarity and with an equally unmistakable finality: "Under no circumstances can they be approved." This is not the language of pastoral nuance; it is the language of doctrinal definitiveness.

The text grounds this classification in two related moral-theological propositions. First, homosexual acts "close the sexual act to the gift of life." This is a claim rooted in the Church's consistent teaching, developed from Scripture and tradition and articulated with particular clarity in the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI (1968), that human sexuality is constitutively ordered toward the procreation of new life. An act that is structurally incapable of

generating life violates this constitutive ordering. Second, homosexual acts "do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity." This adds the dimension of personal complementarity to the procreative argument. The Church teaches that the sexual union of man and woman is not merely a biological event but a personal communion rooted in the irreducible difference and complementarity of male and female. Homosexual acts fail this criterion not because the persons involved are incapable of affection but because the structure of the act excludes the complementarity that authentic sexual self-giving requires.

It is equally important to read CCC 2357 in the light of the two paragraphs that follow it. Paragraph 2358 insists that persons with homosexual inclinations "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity" and that "every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (*Catechism* 2358). Paragraph 2359 calls such persons to chastity as the pathway toward Christian perfection (*Catechism* 2359). The *Catechism* is therefore far from a document of contempt toward persons with homosexual inclinations. It makes a distinction that is theologically fundamental and pastorally indispensable: the distinction between the person, who bears inviolable dignity, and the act, which is gravely disordered. This distinction will bear directly on the pastoral challenge that the Nnewi cultural framework creates, as the article will address in Section 4.

2.2 *The Tradition of Catholic Moral Theology behind the Text*

CCC 2357 does not stand as a novelty in the tradition. It is the convergence point of a stream of moral theological reflection that flows from Sacred Scripture through the Fathers of the Church through the scholastic tradition to the contemporary Magisterium. The scriptural foundation is unambiguous. The letter of Paul to the Romans, chapter 1, verses 26 to 27, presents the abandonment of natural sexual relations for those that are contrary to nature as a form of moral disorder that has its roots in the disordering of the human person's relationship to God. Paul's argument is significant for moral theology precisely because he grounds the condemnation of homosexual acts not in the particularity of Mosaic law but in the created order itself, making the condemnation universal in its reach and accessible to all human beings through the moral sense (Gagnon 229).

The patristic tradition receives and develops this scriptural witness. John Chrysostom, in his fourth homily on the letter to the Romans, undertakes an extended analysis of Paul's text and argues that homosexual acts are a form of violence against nature itself, one that disgraces not merely the persons involved but the created order that God has established (Chrysostom, Homily IV on Romans). Augustine, whose influence on Western moral theology is beyond measure, insists in the *Confessions* that shameful acts against nature are "detestable everywhere and for all time" because they represent a rejection of the order that the Creator has inscribed in human sexual being (Augustine 3.8). The scholastic systematization of this patristic stream finds its fullest expression

in Thomas Aquinas, who classifies acts against nature, including homosexual acts, among the gravest of sins against chastity because they violate the ordering of human sexuality that is, as Aquinas puts it, "determined by nature" for the good of the species and for the service of the Creator's design (Aquinas, *ST* II-II, q. 154, a. 12).

What unites this entire tradition and gives CCC 2357 its authority is the conviction that human sexuality is not a neutral domain available for any use that individuals or cultures might choose to assign it. Human sexuality is, in Catholic moral theology, a gift of God ordered toward specific and constitutive goods: the generation of new life and the personal communion of husband and wife. These goods are not cultural conventions that vary across time and place; they are inscribed in the nature of human sexual being by the Creator himself, and they define the moral horizon within which human sexual life either flourishes or fails. The mother in Nnewi was not, ultimately, arguing against a seminary regulation; she was arguing, without knowing it, against the Creator's design for human sexuality as the Catholic moral tradition has consistently understood it.

3.0 Nnewi Cultural Ethics and the Theology of Sexual Deviance

3.1 The Moral Universe of the Nnewi Igbo Community

To understand the full weight of what the mother's defense represented within the Diocese of Nnewi, it is necessary to understand the moral universe within which the Nnewi Igbo community lives. This moral universe is not simply a set of rules or prohibitions; it is a comprehensive vision of the cosmos, of the human person's place within it, and of the conditions under which communal life flourishes or perishes. Catholic moral theology came to this community not as a foreign imposition that displaced an empty space but as a new articulation of truths that the Igbo cosmological tradition had long carried in its own idiom. The convergence between Catholic moral teaching on sexuality and Igbo cultural ethics on the same subject is one of the most theologically significant features of the Nnewi Catholic situation, and it is a convergence that the mother's argument violated with equal force on both sides.

At the center of Igbo moral cosmology stand two foundational realities whose implications extend throughout every dimension of communal life. The first is *Ani*, the earth deity who functions in Igbo religious thought as the custodian of the moral order, the guardian of communal integrity, and the ultimate judge of human conduct. Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, whose scholarship on Igbo religion remains among the most authoritative available, describes *Ani* as "the owner of men" in the deepest theological sense: the one who holds human life in trust and who holds human communities accountable for the moral order of their common life (Metuh 68). The second foundational reality is the *umunna*, the patrilineal kinship community that constitutes the primary unit of social, moral, and religious accountability in Igbo life. The *umunna* is not merely a

biological or social grouping; it is a moral community in which the acts of each member carry consequences for all, and in which the elders, by tradition and by cosmological appointment, bear the responsibility of maintaining the moral integrity of the whole.

Within this moral universe, human sexuality occupies a place of profound sacredness. Sexuality is not a private matter to be resolved between individuals according to their preferences. It is a cosmological event, woven into the fabric of the procreative order that *Ani* sustains and the ancestors guard. The concept of *ọmụmụ* (fertility and procreation) is among the most sacred obligations in Igbo moral and religious thought. Nwala observes that *ọmụmụ* is understood as the highest blessing the ancestral spirits can bestow upon a family, since it is through the continuity of procreation that the family honors its ancestors, extends the lineage into the future, and maintains its place in the chain of being that links the living, the dead, and the yet unborn (Nwala 89). Sexual acts that are constitutively incapable of achieving *ọmụmụ*, acts that are, by their very structure, closed to the generation of new life, are not experienced in Nnewi merely as moral failures; they are experienced as cosmological tragedies, acts that sever the chain of being and dishonor the ancestors whose memory is perpetuated only through the procreative faithfulness of the living.

The gender complementarity of male and female, expressed in Igbo thought through the categories of *oke* (male) and *nwanyi* (female), carries an equally fundamental cosmological significance. These are not merely biological categories; they are cosmic realities, each bearing a range of meanings and obligations that are intelligible only in their mutual relationship. Uchendu's study of Igbo social organization demonstrates that the complementarity of male and female is understood as a microcosmic reflection of the generative complementarity of heaven and earth, a complementarity whose maintenance in human sexual life is both a moral obligation and a cosmological act of fidelity (Uchendu 88). The union of male and female in marriage is therefore not simply a social institution in Igbo thought; it is a participation in the generative order of the cosmos itself. Homosexual union, which dissolves this complementarity by joining what is cosmologically identical, represents in Nnewi not merely a violation of a social norm but an ontological anomaly, an act that contradicts the very structure of the reality within which human sexual life has its meaning.

3.2 Aru, Nso Ani, and the Community's Response to Sexual Abomination

The Igbo moral category that most directly and comprehensively names what the seminary student's conduct represented is *aru*: abomination. An *aru* is not simply a serious sin in the Western moral-theological sense of an act that damages the agent's relationship with God. It is a cosmic rupture, an act so fundamentally contrary to the moral and natural order that its commission defiles not merely the perpetrator but the family, the *umunna*, and the land itself. Ezekwugo's documentation of Igbo moral categories establishes that homosexual acts are consistently classified among the most severe instances of *aru* in Igbo tradition, alongside incest and the killing of the innocent, and that

their commission is understood to invite the anger of *Ani* in the form of communal catastrophe: the failure of crops, the spread of disease, the loss of ancestral protection (Ezekwugo 102). Achebe gives this theological reality its most memorable literary expression when he observes that *Ani*, "the ultimate judge of morality and conduct," punishes the community that tolerates abomination within its borders (Achebe 36).

Closely related to *aru* is the concept of *nso ani*: the pollution or desecration of the earth. Where *aru* names the act in its moral character, *nso ani* names its cosmological consequence: the defilement of the sacred ground on which the community lives and from which it draws its life. This defilement is not merely metaphorical; it is a theological reality that demands communal response in the form of ritual cleansing and the public reaffirmation of the moral order. Metuh observes that "the communal dimension of moral transgression is primary in Igbo ethics: the sinner does not offend God alone but the whole community of the living and the dead, and the community must respond if it is to maintain its integrity before the ancestors and before *Ani*" (Metuh 78).

It is within this moral and cosmological framework that the conduct of the seminary student in Nnewi must be situated. His homosexual acts were not, in the eyes of the Nnewi community, merely a personal failing or an institutional violation. They were an instance of *aru* committed within a space that the community holds as sacred, a space charged with the formation of its future priests. The seminary is not merely an educational institution in the Nnewi Catholic imagination; it is a space set apart for God, a place in which the community's deepest spiritual aspirations are cultivated and its most sacred vocation nurtured. The commission of *aru* within that space carries a weight that multiplies the gravity of the act several times over. The seminary's response in expelling the student was therefore not merely an institutional decision; it was a moral and cosmological necessity, a response demanded by the logic of both Catholic moral teaching and Igbo communal ethics.

3.3 The Family's Moral Obligation in Igbo Cultural Ethics

No analysis of the mother's conduct before the seminary authorities would be complete without an engagement with what Igbo cultural ethics teaches about the moral obligations of the family, and of parents in particular, in the formation and correction of the moral life of their children. In the Igbo moral tradition, the family is not merely a domestic unit; it is a moral institution charged by the ancestors and by *Ani* with the responsibility of forming its members in the way of right living. Parents, and mothers in particular, bear a special accountability for the moral character of their children, an accountability that extends beyond the grave into the realm of ancestral judgment.

Francis Arinze, reflecting on the moral theology of Igbo family life, observes that the Igbo parent who fails to correct a child's moral deviance does not merely fail the child; the parent participates in the deviance and becomes, in the eyes of the community and the ancestors, morally implicated in its

consequences (Arinze 67). The expectation embedded in Igbo communal ethics is that when a member of a family commits *aru*, the family's first response must be one of grief, accountability, and commitment to restoration. The family is expected to cooperate with the community's moral judgment, not to contest it. A family that defends *aru* before the community does not merely fail in its duty; it compounds the pollution, extending *nso ani* from the child to the parent and, by extension, to the entire *umunna*. The mother who stood before the seminary authorities in Nnewi and argued for her son's right to commit homosexual acts was, within the full weight of Igbo moral tradition, not only wrong; she was herself committing a form of moral transgression by publicly endorsing and defending what her culture regards as among the most serious violations of the communal moral order.

4.0 The Audacity Examined: When a Mother Defends the Indefensible

4.1 The Moral Inversion at the Heart of the Defense

The mother's argument deserves to be named for what it is: a moral inversion. A moral inversion is not merely an error in reasoning; it is a condition in which the categories of right and wrong have been so thoroughly displaced that what ought to be a source of shame presents itself as a source of grievance, and what ought to be an occasion for moral accountability presents itself as an occasion for advocacy. The mother did not come to the seminary in ignorance. She came with an argument. And the audacity of that argument lies not simply in its content but in its posture: the posture of a person who has so completely internalized a counterfeit moral framework that the genuine moral framework, represented by Catholic teaching and Igbo communal ethics alike, appears to her not as truth but as oppression.

Her argument rested on an analogy between freedom of worship and freedom of sexual action. This analogy has a surface plausibility drawn from the rhetorical world of modern rights discourse, and it is worth taking seriously enough to expose its failure with precision. Freedom of worship is protected in liberal constitutional traditions and in Catholic social teaching alike, though for different reasons. In Catholic social teaching, religious freedom is grounded in the dignity of the human person and in the recognition that authentic faith cannot be coerced, but this protection of religious freedom has never been understood by the Church as an endorsement of the moral equivalence of all religious practices. The Church protects the person's freedom to seek God according to their conscience; it does not affirm that all paths equally reach God or that all religious practices are equally good. The analogy with sexual freedom fails at exactly this point. The freedom of the person to act in the sexual domain does not imply the moral equivalence of all sexual acts, any more than freedom of worship implies the moral equivalence of all religious acts. CCC 2357 establishes with definitive authority that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can under no circumstances be approved. No appeal to freedom, whether of worship or of action, can override a moral judgment of that categorical character.

There is a further dimension to the mother's failure that is specifically cultural and specifically Nnewi in its significance. She invoked the language of freedom as though it were a currency that could be exchanged across all moral contexts without loss of value. But the Nnewi Igbo moral tradition does not recognize the sovereignty of individual preference as a moral category. Freedom, in the Igbo moral universe, is always already embedded within a web of obligations: obligations to the family, to the *umunna*, to the ancestors, and to *Ani* herself. The concept of unfettered personal autonomy, in which the individual's choice is the ultimate arbiter of the rightness of an act, is not merely foreign to Igbo moral thought; it is incoherent within it. To invoke personal freedom as a justification for *aru* in the presence of a Nnewi institution is not merely to make a bad argument; it is to speak in a moral language that the community's deepest traditions regard as unintelligible and dangerous.

4.2 The Shamelessness as Theological Symptom

The researcher's description of the mother as speaking "with confidence" is the detail that most demands theological reflection. Shame, in Catholic moral theology and in Igbo moral tradition alike, is not merely an emotional state; it is a moral signal, the affective echo of the conscience's recognition that something has gone wrong. Augustine understood shame as the soul's residual awareness of the moral order even in the act of transgressing it (Augustine, *City of God* 14.20). The Igbo tradition regards the absence of shame in the face of *aru* as itself a moral catastrophe, a sign that the person's moral formation has been so thoroughly damaged that the very mechanism of conscience has been silenced.

The mother's confidence, her freedom from apparent shame, is therefore not simply a personality trait; it is a theological symptom. It signals that her moral formation, both Catholic and Igbo, has failed to equip her with the moral grammar necessary to recognize homosexual conduct as the serious disorder that CCC 2357 declares it to be and that Igbo tradition classifies as *aru*. This failure of formation is not hers alone. It implicates the Diocese, the parish community, and the wider Catholic educational enterprise that ought to have formed her conscience with the full weight of the Church's moral teaching. The researcher's encounter with this mother is therefore not merely a case study in individual moral failure; it is a diagnostic window into a systemic failure of catechesis and moral formation that the Diocese of Nnewi must address with urgency.

Charles Taylor's analysis of the secular age provides a useful theoretical frame for understanding how this formation failure has come about. Taylor argues that modernity has produced what he calls a "nova effect," in which the proliferation of moral frameworks and the collapse of traditional normative authorities leaves individuals adrift in a landscape of competing values, increasingly likely to construct their moral self-understanding from the resources of popular culture and rights discourse rather than from the resources of religious tradition and communal wisdom (Taylor 300). In the Nnewi

context, this means that a Catholic mother can absorb enough of the language of rights and personal freedom from the surrounding culture to construct an argument in defense of her son's homosexual conduct, even while her Catholic faith and her Igbo heritage both possess far more powerful and far more deeply grounded resources for naming that conduct as wrong. The tragedy is not that she found a language for defending her son; the tragedy is that her formation had not given her a language more compelling than the one she used.

5.0 The Nigerian Legal and Canonical Framework: A Third Voice of Condemnation

5.1 The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2014

The condemnation of homosexual conduct in the Diocese of Nnewi is not confined to the registers of Catholic moral theology and Igbo cultural ethics. It is also the explicit and unambiguous verdict of Nigerian civil law, which independently arrives at the same conclusion through the mechanisms of democratic legislation. The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, signed into law by President Goodluck Jonathan on January 7, 2014, represents the most comprehensive statutory expression of this civil condemnation. The Act prohibits the contracting or solemnization of same-sex marriages and civil unions in Nigeria, criminalizes the registration and operati<on of gay organizations, prescribes penalties of ten to fourteen years of imprisonment for public displays of same-sex affection, and criminalizes any direct or indirect public expression of same-sex amorous relationships (Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, sections 1 to 6).

The breadth of these provisions and the severity of the penalties they prescribe reflect the depth of the social and moral consensus they express. Nigeria's legislature did not produce this Act in a moral vacuum. It produced it as the statutory articulation of the convictions of a predominantly religious people for whom homosexuality is simultaneously a theological offense, a cultural abomination, and a threat to the procreative and familial order on which communal life depends. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria gave voice to this convergent conviction in its communique following the 2013 plenary session, declaring its categorical rejection of same-sex unions and grounding that rejection in the teaching of the natural law as understood by the Catholic moral tradition: "No amount of social engineering, cultural pressure, or legal manipulation can alter the natural law written by God in the human heart and in the order of creation" (CBCN, *Communique* 3).

The relevance of the Act to the specific situation in the Diocese of Nnewi is direct and concrete. The sexual acts committed by the seminary student against younger students and his initiation of those younger students into homosexual conduct fall within the scope of conduct that Nigerian civil law criminalizes. The mother who appeared before the seminary authorities to defend her son's conduct was, therefore, not merely contesting a canonical decision; she was, from the perspective of Nigerian civil law, defending conduct that the state

itself regards as criminal. Her appeal to freedom of action was not merely theologically incoherent; it was legally untenable.

5.2 The Canonical Framework and the Logic of the Expulsion

Within the Catholic Church's own legal order, the expulsion of the seminary student was grounded in a canonical framework whose logic is both principled and rigorous. Canon 234§1 of the *Code of Canon Law* establishes the minor seminary as an institution charged not merely with academic formation but with the comprehensive moral and spiritual development of candidates suited to eventual priestly ministry. Canon 241§1 requires that those admitted to the major seminary be persons of "integral faith, right intention, good reputation, integral morals, and proven virtues", and the same requirements apply in their appropriate form to the minor seminary as a preparatory institution. The student's conduct violated each of these requirements simultaneously.

The Congregation for Catholic Education's 2005 Instruction *Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies* provides the specific canonical and doctrinal context most directly applicable to the situation. The Instruction affirms that the Church "cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality" because such conduct is fundamentally incompatible with the demands of priestly formation and with the seminary's responsibility for the moral integrity of all its students (Congregation for Catholic Education 2). The abuse of younger students and their deliberate initiation into homosexual acts introduced the additional canonical gravity of harm to minors, which the *Vademecum* of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (2022) treats with particular seriousness as a violation that demands institutional accountability of the highest order.

Taken together, the canonical provisions governing seminary formation, the magisterial teaching of CCC 2357, and the specific norms applicable to cases involving sexual misconduct and the harm of minors make the seminary's expulsion of the student not merely permissible but canonically required. The mother's argument that this was an infringement of liberty was therefore, from the canonical perspective, a claim without foundation. The Church has the right and the duty to govern her own institutions according to her own moral norms, and those norms, expressed with full authority in CCC 2357 and in the canonical provisions that operationalize it, admit of no exception for the kind of conduct her son had committed.

5.3 Three Authorities, One Verdict: The Anatomy of Total Illegitimacy

The analysis of the preceding sections has established that the condemnation of homosexual acts in the Diocese of Nnewi is not the verdict of a single authority that might conceivably be contested or negotiated. It is the convergent verdict of three independent and mutually reinforcing normative authorities: Catholic moral theology as expressed in CCC 2357, Igbo cultural and cosmological ethics

as operative in the Nnewi community, and the civil law of the Nigerian state. This convergence constitutes what this article designates a total moral illegitimacy: a situation in which homosexual acts are condemned simultaneously from within the theological order of divine and natural law, from within the cosmological order of Igbo communal ethics, and from within the juridical order of Nigerian civil and canonical law.

The significance of this total illegitimacy for the pastoral situation in Nnewi is twofold. First, it establishes the moral and institutional response of the Diocese on grounds so thoroughly reinforced that no single-dimensional challenge, such as the mother's appeal to personal freedom, can destabilize it. The mother argued as though she were contesting a cultural preference; she was in fact contesting a convergent moral consensus whose foundations extend from the eternal law of God through the natural law inscribed in human sexual being through the cosmological ethics of her own Igbo tradition to the statutory law of her own nation. Second, the total illegitimacy establishes the terms within which the Diocese must conduct its pastoral response, both to the immediate situation of the student and to the wider challenge of moral formation that the mother's conduct reveals.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This article has argued that the illegitimacy of homosexuality in the Catholic Diocese of Nnewi is total in the sense defined above: it is simultaneously moral, cultural, and juridical, grounded in the convergent authority of Catholic moral theology, Igbo cosmological ethics, and Nigerian civil law. The occasion for the argument was a pastoral encounter of significant theological weight: a Catholic mother's shameless defense of her son's homosexual conduct at a minor seminary, an act of moral inversion that this article has examined from the perspectives of Catholic moral theology, Igbo cultural ethics, and the civil and canonical law of Nigeria. The article has demonstrated that the mother's argument fails at every level at which it can be engaged: it misuses the analogy between religious and sexual freedom; it contradicts the unambiguous declaration of CCC 2357 that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can under no circumstances be approved; it violates the deepest convictions of the Igbo moral tradition that classifies homosexual acts as *aru* and *nso ani*; and it is legally untenable under the provisions of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014.

The article has further argued that the mother's confidence, her visible freedom from shame in the defense of the indefensible, is not merely a personal moral failure but a diagnostic symptom of a systemic failure of catechesis and moral formation in the Diocese. It is a symptom that demands a response not merely at the level of institutional discipline but at the level of sustained, integrated, and culturally resonant moral formation.

6.2 Recommendations

For the Diocese of Nnewi: The Diocese must treat the pastoral encounter that occasions this article not as an isolated incident but as a window into a systemic formation failure that demands urgent and comprehensive response. A formation program in Catholic sexual ethics must be developed for all levels of the Diocese's educational and pastoral life: for seminarians and their families, for parish communities, for Catholic school teachers and catechists, and for parents. This program must be simultaneously rooted in the moral theological tradition of the Church, drawing particularly on CCC 2357 to 2359, and articulated in the idiom of Nnewi Igbo cultural ethics, drawing on the moral authority of *Ani*, the concept of *aru*, and the communal obligations of the *umunna*. The convergence between Catholic teaching and Igbo moral tradition on the question of homosexuality is a pastoral resource of the first order; the Diocese must learn to use it deliberately and systematically.

For the Minor Seminary: The seminary must develop explicit and ongoing formation in Catholic sexual ethics as a constitutive component of its regular curriculum, not merely as a reactive response to pastoral crises. This formation must include the careful teaching of the tripartite distinction between person, inclination, and act that CCC 2357 to 2359 collectively sustain, so that the seminary produces not merely students who know the rules but students who have internalized the moral vision from which the rules flow. The seminary must also develop protocols for communicating with parents of students about matters of moral formation, so that the kind of encounter the researcher witnessed is less likely to occur, or is better handled when it does.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria: The CBCN must commission a comprehensive pastoral document on homosexuality in the Nigerian Catholic context, one that engages the full theological depth of CCC 2357 to 2359 rather than confining itself to the condemnation of homosexual acts. Such a document must also address the specific challenge of liberal rights discourse as it penetrates traditionally conservative Catholic communities, providing the pastoral and theological resources that parish priests and catechists need to respond to the kind of argument the mother in Nnewi advanced, with the clarity of Catholic moral theology and the authority of Igbo cultural ethics working together.

For Igbo Catholic Moral Theologians: There is a pressing need for sustained and rigorous scholarship at the intersection of Catholic moral theology and Igbo cultural ethics on the question of human sexuality. Such scholarship would serve the double purpose of deepening the Church's inculturated engagement with the Igbo moral tradition and of equipping the Diocese of Nnewi and similar communities with intellectual resources for a pastoral response that is both theologically sound and culturally resonant. The convergences between the two traditions on this question are deep and structurally significant; they deserve the kind of sustained scholarly attention that this article has only begun to provide.

6.3 A Final Word

In the end, the mother's defense of her son was not simply wrong in the way that a mistaken argument is wrong. It was wrong in the way that a moral inversion is wrong: it reversed the order of things, it defended the indefensible, and it did so in a sacred space before a Catholic institution with a confidence that should have been occupied by shame. The theologian's response to such a moment is not contempt for the person who makes the argument; the *Catechism* forbids that contempt with equal clarity in CCC 2358. The theologian's response is to take the moment seriously as a diagnostic of the community's moral health, to name what it reveals with the precision that Catholic moral theology and Igbo cultural ethics together make possible, and to propose a path of formation and renewal that leads the community back to the moral inheritance it has begun to lose.

CCC 2357 declares that homosexual acts "can under no circumstances be approved." That declaration is not the end of a conversation; it is the beginning of a pastoral responsibility. The Diocese of Nnewi carries that responsibility in a context shaped by one of the most morally serious cultural traditions in Africa, a tradition that has its own profound reasons for arriving at the same verdict. The task now is to bring these two traditions into the kind of sustained and serious dialogue that produces not merely moral condemnation but the comprehensive formation of conscience without which condemnation remains a voice in the wilderness.

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