



## SAME SEX MARRIAGE: ITS IMPLICATIONS ON FAMILY, MORAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE SOCIETY.

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### **Abstract**

*The debate over same-sex marriage has been a prominent issue in our society, hence, this paper x-rayed the family, social and moral implication of same sex marriage. In doing this, the paper takes a cursory look at the sacredness of marriage, Same sex Marriage Debate in Historical Perspectives and finally the implications of same sex marriage on the family, morality and society. The paper concluded by noting that Strong, stable families, headed by a father and mother, are the anchor of society. When marriage is undermined by gender confusion and by distortions of its God-given meaning, the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identities as men or women. Some will find it more difficult to engage in wholesome courtships, form stable marriages, and raise another generation imbued with moral strength and purpose.*

### **Introduction**

In early January, 2014, President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law something called the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2014. In many ways, the law reiterates laws already on the books that outlaw homosexual practices. It outlaws same-sex marriage or civil union, which was already illegal and nobody was asking for. It outlaws the "registration of gay clubs, societies and organization, their sustenance, processions and meetings" and "the public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly." The law ends in punishment. Fourteen years imprisonment for gay marriage or civil union, i.e. for "the coming together of persons of the same sex with the purpose of living together as husband and wife or for the purpose of same sexual relationship." Anyone who acts as 'witness' to any such criminal offenses same sex marriage or civil union, the registration of gay clubs, societies, or organizations is also in violation of the law. As is anyone who does not report suspicious activity.

From here the script, with a few notable exceptions, is dismally, depressingly familiar. 'Western' nation-States in particular the United States, the United Kingdom, and some members of the European Union criticize the new law and threaten limited aid cut offs. In response, the 'nation' invokes 'culture' .. over and over and over again. From *Sahara Reporters* to the *Vanguard* to *Punch* and beyond, from pastor to lawyer to activist to person on the street to the "human rights and women's rights activist" who argues against being forced to legalize same-sex marriage (which, again, no one was arguing for), an almighty hue and cry was raised across the land. Nigeria is under attack. Culture is under attack. Sexual purity is under attack. The Bible is under attack. The children are under attack. Nigerians support the new law and want a stronger law. Clergy praised the State and thanked the Good Lord for the new law, while police carried out more sweeps and conducted more arrests, and thousands threw stones into Sharia courts, trying men for 'gay crimes'. The crowds had decided the State was right, and due process was way too slow for this sort of epidemic.

Understandably, most, but not all, of those who publicly opposed the law have done so from outside the country. Binyavanga Wainaina found the lost chapter of his memoir ... courageously. From England, Ifeanyi Odiwole despaired of the law's 'stupidity'. Bisi Alimi, who had to flee Nigeria for having come out publicly, argues that the law is a 'distraction', given the difficulty Jonathan's government currently has. Alimi notes that the vast majority of Nigerians oppose child marriage, and yet there is no law banning child marriage. Patience Akumu agrees: "Vetoing an anti-gay law will not change a dictator into a democrat or revive a failing economic system." For many, both in and outside of Nigeria, the law is a crime against humanity and a crime against reason. Yet, majority of Nigerians have lauded the passage of the same sex prohibition law especially from the moral angle. This paper as such intends to help strengthen the moral argument supporting the passage of the prohibition of the same sex marriage in Nigeria.

### **The Vital Importance and Sacredness of Marriage**

Marriage is sacred and was ordained of God from before the foundation of the world. Jesus Christ affirmed the divine origins of marriage: "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. From the beginning, the sacred nature of marriage was closely linked to the power of procreation. After creating Adam and Eve, God commanded them to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and they brought forth children, forming the first family. Only a man and a woman together have the natural biological capacity to conceive children. This power of procreation to create life and bring God's spirit children into the world is divinely given. Misuse of this power undermines the institution of the family. For millennia, strong families have served as the fundamental institution for transmitting to future generations the moral strengths, traditions, and values that sustain civilization. In 1948, the world's nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, affirming that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.

Marriage is far more than a contract between individuals to ratify their affections and provide for mutual obligations. Rather, marriage is a vital institution for rearing children and teaching them to become responsible adults. Throughout the ages, governments of all types have recognized marriage as essential in preserving social stability and perpetuating life. Regardless of whether marriages were performed as a religious rite or a civil ceremony, in almost every culture marriage has been protected and endorsed by governments primarily to preserve and foster the institution most central to rearing children and teaching them the moral values that undergird civilization.

It is true that some couples who marry will not have children, either by choice or because of infertility. The special status granted marriage is nevertheless closely linked to the inherent powers and responsibilities of procreation and to the innate differences between the genders. By contrast, same-sex marriage is an institution no longer linked to gender or the biological realities and complementary natures of male and female. Its effect is to decouple marriage from its central role in creating life, nurturing time-honored values, and fostering family bonds across generations.

### **Same sex Marriage Debate in Historical Perspectives**

Same-sex is an adjective of, for, relating to people of the same sex specifically homosexuals (Langrish, 2010). Same sex/ homosexuality is romantic sexual attraction or behaviour among members of the same sex. Same sex marriage is a marriage contract that is restricted to members of the same-sex - gay men and lesbians. It is also described as gay marriage but the gay positive groups prefer to be addressed as marriage equality. Their agitations have been that: (a) the treatment given to them is unjust and unfair in a democratic set up. (b) they are not accorded dignity and respect. (c) they are denied human right and freedom of choice of marriage partners. (d) they should be allowed to naturally express their sexual needs (e) they are also demanding for financial protection and as such would want the civil partnership union to be given full religious rights. Though there is long history of homosexual practices, the idea of same sex marriage was rare, widely unacceptable, and unknown until the mid-nineties. This was followed by the continued campaign for homosexual marriage, and civil union. These agitations have brought about a paradigm shift in the societal understanding and attitudes towards homosexual relationships.

Same-sex marriage has split the unity of the Anglican Church. In some countries like the United States of America, it is a practice that is complex, divisive and delicate to handle. The Church now operates under two umbrellas - the conservative group and the liberals. The liberals advocate that same-sex marriage should be legalized and accorded full rights of recognition as other marriage contracts are done. Particularly in England, the conservative bishops maintain that the Church is not prepared to abandon its traditional teachings in favour of the idea of gender neutral marriage. The Church also considers it vital to maintain a critical distance from the state and to resist what the state is doing if this is at odds with scripture (Doughty, 2010). Tracing the matter of same sex down historical lane, it must be recalled that in 1533, the English Common law tradition of criminalizing Sodomy began with a proclamation from King Henry VIII. At the time, Sodomy was described as any non-procreative sexual activity and thus included masturbation and oral sex. Homosexuality was first used at the time. In fact, Oluwole, a Nigerian bishop commented thus, "same sex union whatever guise it may manifest homosexuality, lesbianism, sodomy, bisexuality, gay, civil partnership, is unnatural, unbiblical, unreasonable, unethical, ungodly and unAfrican".

The full endorsement of homosexual/ same -sex marriage as religious act has sparked off an unending debate in the English Churches. It is a major threat to Church advancement in the Contemporary Church. The battle is between the Episcopal Church/ the liberals and the conservative Church on the one hand and the state on the other. The house of Bishops (gays) voted by a wide margin to allow gays and lesbians to be consecrated as bishops. They decided to move forward on all fronts with regularizing the status of gays and lesbians with the Church (Silk, 2009). Their claim is that they aim at a Church where there are no outcasts in line with the vision of former presiding bishop Browning. Recently, 'civil partnerships' were legalized in England by the 2010 Labour Equality Act. The major issue of debate is that such contracts should be held in religious worship centres. Liberal democrats like Fatherstone (2010) argued that an amendment made in the House of Lords to the Equality Act 2010 removed the express prohibition on civil partnership registration taking place in religious premises. Representing the opinion of the liberal Democrats, she insisted that lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender marriages be conducted with religious language music, and Bible readings. However, the Church of England remains resolute on its position not to permit Same- sex/ civil partnerships or registrations in their premises (Langrish, 2010). Earlier on in June 15, 2008 the first Church of England's gay marriage between Peter Cowell and David Lord (both priests) was performed in defiance of the bishop of London (Crammer, 2009). As more moves towards endorsing gay marriages and conducting of civil partnerships in Churches are made, the Episcopalists have nominated Jeffrey John as gay Bishop. Jeffrey who they claimed as the most suitable is to replace Tom Butler who retired earlier this year (Santoscoy, 2010). This development has been resisted by the UK conservatives who have warned of a split if a gay bishop is installed. The warning issued by the Church of England is in line with the reaction of the Anglican conservatives in North America who formed a rival church in protest of the consecration of Gene Robinson as gay bishop. This happened in 2003 in America. Recent occurrences on the issue of same-sex reveal that the Church is experiencing intensified pressure both from within and without. While the liberal Democrats insist that gay marriage be integrated fully as Church rite, the conservatives are fully resistant of the new trend in the Church.

#### **Implication on Reproduction and the family.**

One important aspect of creation is the charge given to man to be fruitful and replenish the earth. Man needs to tend the earth, maintain it and ensure its continuity. Man can achieve this through a heterosexual union and not through the same sex union. Reproduction is therefore a very fundamental aspect of marriage for the continuity of the human race. The implication of creating the woman for the man was an avenue of sustenance of the earth. It is not good for the man to be alone without the ability to procreate. When God brought the man and the woman together, the family emerged. The family unit is a very strategic structure in the society. Societal life is shaped through the family unit. The family provides the avenue for proper nurturing of children and consequently the entire society. God in his infinite wisdom knew that the society can only be ideally impacted by the family. By trusting the family in the hands of the man and woman, God intended that through the complementary efforts of the two, the children will be given proper direction. Socialization of the institution of marriage will eventually destabilize the home and alter God's plan for the family. It creates confusion of gender role and identity for the younger generation. It denies a child right or access to a love of a father or mother. And, a child needs the love of both parents. The presence of both parents seems to be necessary for proper emotional and mental development of a child. Same sex marriage negates divine order of procreation through sexual relationship of man and woman. Recent trends in the same sex saga show that gay couples now make moves to adopt children. Labour laws are supporting that gay couples can adopt children. Arguments raised by gay couples are that children are not necessarily hindered psychologically and may not end up as gays. They have also disputed the role of the environment in child nurturing. (Ramon Johnson). Whatever may be their philosophy, this paper maintains that since the gay position is non-scripturally based, the issue of gay child adoption is a distortion of the divine order for family. Same- sex marriage is incompatible with the creation of male and female as distinct and yet complementary sexual beings. After instituting marriage, God gave the man and woman the authority to pro-create in order to multiply and fill the earth. Sex between two men or two women cannot produce children. The order of having a family only to adopt children as family members is an aberration and distortion of the original order placed by God.

#### **Implications on Morality and Society.**

The possible diminishing of religious freedom is not the only societal implication of legalizing same-sex marriage. Perhaps the most common argument that proponents of same-sex marriage make is that it is essentially harmless and will not affect the institution of traditional heterosexual marriage in any way. "It won't affect your marriage, so why should you care?" is the common refrain. While it may be true that allowing same-sex marriage will not immediately and directly affect existing marriages, the real question is how it will affect society as a whole over time, including the rising generation and future generations.

In addition to undermining and diluting the sacred nature of marriage, legalizing same-sex marriage brings many practical implications in the sphere of public policy that will be of concern to parents and society. When a government legalizes same-sex marriage as a civil right, it will almost certainly enforce a wide variety of other policies to enforce this. The implications of these policies are critical to understanding the seriousness of condoning same-sex marriage.

The all-important question of public policy must be: what environment is best for the child and for the rising generation?

While some same-sex couples will obtain guardianship over children, traditional marriage provides the most solid and well-established social identity for children. It increases the likelihood that they will be able to form a clear gender identity, with sexuality closely linked to both love and procreation. By contrast, the legal recognition of same-sex marriage may, over time, erode the social identity, gender development, and moral character of children. No dialogue on this issue can be complete without taking into account the long-term consequences for children.

As one example of how children will be adversely affected, the establishment of same-sex marriage as a civil right will inevitably entail changes in school curricula. When the state says that same-sex marriages are equivalent to heterosexual marriages, public school administrators will feel obligated to support this claim. This has already happened in many jurisdictions, where from elementary school through high school, children are taught that marriage can be defined as a legal union between two adults of any gender, that the definition of family is fluid, and in some cases that consensual sexual relations are morally neutral. In addition, in many areas, schools are not required to notify parents of this curriculum or to give families the opportunity to opt out. These developments are already causing clashes between the agenda of secular school systems and the right of parents to teach their children deeply held standards of morality.

Throughout history, the family has served as an essential bulwark of individual liberty. The walls of a home provide a defense against detrimental social influences and the sometimes overreaching powers of government. In the absence of abuse or neglect, government does not have the right to intervene in the rearing and moral education of children in the home. Strong, independent families are vital for political and religious freedom.

Besides, by declaring that man should not be alone, God was opposed to the practice of celibacy and the suitable help mate, the woman is opposed to the same sex union. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fail, one will lift up his companion. But woe to Him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? (Ecc. 4:9-11). When eventually God created the woman by taking her out of the man's ribs, he brought her to the man by himself. Adam's joyful shout at the sight of the woman is worthy of note. He exclaimed, "this is it, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman. Therefore comes the verdict 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to cling or adhere, abide fast) fast together and be joined (together) (Strong, 1990) to his' woman and they both shall become one flesh (Matt. 19: 5&6). Marriage is a re-joining of two constituent parts: male and female of a man. What was one flesh in man, in marriage comes together again, and once more become one flesh in husband and wife and together they form an inseparable partnership. One 'fleshness' is related to sexual union, sexual union is reserved to marriage, between a man and a woman. This union excludes adultery, fornication, and homosexuality. Adultery and fornication were ruled out as violations of the creator's holiness. The sexuality aspect of marriage is a divinely endowed ability for procreation. Only a man and woman together have the natural biological capacity to produce children.

This power of procreation of life in order to bring God's spirit children into the world is sacred and precious. When and only when the family is rightly constituted should it provide a good environment for the rearing of children and inculcation of good moral values. Protection should be provided for the children and conducive atmosphere so that societal life can be prolonged. Christian marriage is not just a social affair or contract which people just move into without the consciousness of its sacredness (Okwueze, 2004). Christian marriage is not meant to be a co-habitation involving all forms of modern endorsed marriages: single parenthood, out of wedlock births, separation and divorce. In fact, in an ideal society, every child should be raised by both a father and a mother. The complementary efforts of two are ideally important both for short and long term effects on the children (Blankenhorn reported in Newsroom, 2008).

Marriage was instituted by God from the foundation of the world to be a sacred union. Marriage was not meant for same-sex, lesbians but for male and female folks. Attesting to this heterosexual nature of marriage, Jesus declared "have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female. It is for this reason that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they both become one flesh, Matthew 19: 4ff. A man cleaves, glues to a woman, not a man to his fellow man. The sacred nature of marriage is closely linked to the power of procreation. The misuse of this power undermines the institution of family and therefore weakens reproduction. The sanctity of marriage which was made obvious from Genesis 2:18-24 presupposes morality in the home and the society. A modification of marriage to include same-sex union will deprive marriage of its biblical meaning. Same-sex marriage will result in the neglect of moral principles. In fact, same sex marriage anchors on immorality. The Bible instructs that any form of marriage that opposes the divine principle of one man, one woman is a distortion of divine order. As Stamps (2010) puts it, the marriage which God formed excludes adultery, polygamy, homosexuality, immoral living and unscriptural divorce. Legalization of same-sex marriage will slowly destroy the sanctity of marriage.

#### Conclusion:

The debate on same sex marriage is an unending one posing legal, ethical and moral challenges to both the society and religious institutions. The church has not been able to handle this issue. It has become an object of threat to the unity of the body of Christ especially in the Anglican Communion. The development in the secular society in its acceptance of homosexual life style has put pressure on the Church to yield to its secular counterpart. While some denominations like Episcopal Church of

United States of America has accepted the idea of same-sex marriage, others like the Anglican Church of England and the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, continue to face the ever growing political and socio-ecclesia pressure to give in. The Church has no consensual view on the moral basis of same-sex marriage. Advocates of both sides have continued to air their views on the knotty matter.

No ethical issue has in recent times generated much debate in the church and the society like the issue of the acceptance of same-sex marriage. Although societal attitude towards it varies from culture to culture, the idea of committed monogamous same-sex marriage is incompatible with the scripture. From Genesis 1 onwards, the Bible repeatedly affirms that God created man and woman for a lifelong marriage relationship. The difference in their genders constitutes the foundation for sexual union and establishes men's procreative possibilities. Marriage as a heterosexual covenant relationship is the initiative of God right from the beginning. Homosexual marriage is a violation of divine order and design. The divine order for marriage is man is to woman and not man is to man as some argue. God's standard for marriage overrides cultural and societal legislations. Sexual expression between a man and woman is natural and fulfilling. God, the initiator of marriage provided principles that should guide marriage relationships. In same-sex sexual relationship, it is like trying to attach a screw to a screw or a nut to a nut. This is a violation of design and purpose. A screw is meant for a nut. In short, it is an assault on the integrity of God, the creator, and his intention of creating human beings into two distinct and complementary genders. Any change or threat to change the culture is distressing to many people and to the structure of the fundamental building block of society and family.

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