



AFRICA REGIONAL SEXUALITY
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Religion and Sexuality: Individuality, Choice and Sexual Rights in Nigerian Christianity

PROFESSOR MATTHEWS A. OJO

*Department of Religious Studies
Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria*

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Introduction

Generally, regulation of sexual behaviour has been an important concern for many religious groups at various times and in various cultural settings. The extent to which any religious group will legislate to control sexual behavior and even marriage and marital unions depends largely on whether the religious group is sectarian and consequently world-rejecting in its response to the prevalent societal values or whether the religious group has become established and therefore has become world-affirming. This polar distinction determines not only the perspectives on sexuality but also the response of the religious group to the society in which it finds itself.

Secondly, the perceived goals of a religious organization and the manner it wants to achieve such goals also influences how the group will control sexual expressions among its members. A religious group may use the societal values as its reference point or may resort to internal dynamics or an agenda of renewal in deciding how to regulate sexual behaviour. Notwithstanding the issues that determine regulations of sexual behaviour, the social functions of most regulations are to test members' fidelity to church doctrines and practices, verifying the depth of spiritual maturity of their members, specifying the manner of inter-personal relationships particularly across the gender division, and as a means of subordinating members to the leaders.

Although evangelical religious groups have commonly been conservative in their approach to sexual behaviour and have sought to control the manner and process by which sexual rights could be exercised, a few religious groups have broken away from the traditional norm. For example, the Oneida community of New York in the mid-nineteenth century practiced free love and made available all women and wives freely to their male members. Members believed that they belonged to a single family, and monogamy was regarded as exerting selfish control and ownership over women. Consequently, every man was married to every woman in the group and exclusive relationship was not allowed. Likewise, the Mormons practiced a form of polygamy that encouraged mating to populate the world with godly children.¹

Likewise in Nigeria in the 1960s and 1970s, Emmanuel Odumosu, the Jesus of Oyingbo, founder of the College of Regeneration with a large commune in Maryland, Lagos possessed sexual privileges over any female member or the wives of his converts. Women who submitted themselves to Odumosu and even had children for him regarded such as part of their religious obligations to the group. In recent times, the controversy over the ordination of homosexuals as priests and bishops in the Anglican Communion in the West indicates on one hand an attempt to promote a liberal view of human sexuality that coincides with contemporary sexual freedom. On the other hand, the controversy reveals the Church's attempt to affirm its traditional conservative position on the issue.

Despite the sexual deviancy and latitude of sexual freedom in some groups and the acceptance of these lifestyles by members of the groups, orthodox Christianity has generally sought to regulate and control sexual expressions among their members along what have been perceived as biblical standards. For example, the Shakers, another prominent religious group in nineteenth-century North America outlawed marriage and

¹ Lawrence Forster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984.

sexual expression. Marriage was considered as the source of evil; hence the Shakers separated the sexes into 'communal family' and encouraged celibacy, and communal child rearing.²

Similarly, certain sectarian groups in Nigeria in the 1980s legislated strictly on the sexual behaviour of their members. For example, the choice of a marriage partner, the date of wedding, the manner of the wedding ceremony, the manner of expressing sexual intimacy ceased to be an individual choice but became the decision of certain marriage committees or the pronouncements of leaders and pastors. In view of the above, the manner in which religious groups legislate on the sexual behaviour of their members raises the question of the extent to which religious groups recognize members' sexual rights and freedom of choice in pursuance of healthy and pleasurable sexuality, particularly in and outside marriage. It is this ongoing concern about individual choice, reproductive rights, the quest for sexual freedom and pleasure, and generally the debate to extend human rights to the sexual and reproductive spheres, that informs the concern of this paper.

This paper discusses the importance attached to sexuality in Christianity and explores the various teachings of Christian churches on sexual rights and the limits of such rights against the background of the teachings of the church. Five specific issues namely, chastity or abstinence from pre-marital sex, abortion, safe sex practice, reproductive rights within marriage and homosexuality are discussed. I argue that the control of sexual behaviour by Christian groups is an institutional way and the most ubiquitous modalities through which religious groups demonstrate power and exercise social control over their members.

Although personal choices are not totally ruled out, this freedom to choose is often moderated by the Scriptural prescription on sexuality. Undeniably, those who affirm themselves as members of religious groups are assumed to have submitted their whole being including their sexuality to be influenced by the teachings and norms of the groups. To believe otherwise is to exercise a choice to leave the groups and leave the moral protection that such religious groups offer. For this present discussion, examples and case studies will be limited to Christian Churches in Nigeria. Discussion is based on data and information obtained from books, pamphlets, Bible study outlines, seminars, and various articles in the print media – all emanating from Evangelicals, Pentecostals and Catholics.

Literature Review

Existing literature on sexuality has dwelled largely on understanding the physiological, psychological and social perspectives of sexual expression. The need to understand masturbation as part of sexual pleasures informs the concerns of Coleman (2002), Hurlbert et al (1991), and Zamboni and Crawford (2002), while Ellison (2000), Weeks and James (1998) and Warner and Bancroft (1998) discussed the relationship of sexual practices to satisfaction and general human well being. However, it was Lawrence Foster (1984) that specifically examined the dimension of sexuality in American religious groups from a sociological perspective. Other scholars such as Cosgel (2000) examined the focus of sexuality within the family structure in sectarian religious groups. Earlier works focusing on African case studies have generally examined marriage as a social institution in the construction of power relationships in the society, Guyer (1990) and Olajubu (2003).

² Metin M. Cosgel, "The Family in Utopia: Celibacy, Communal Child Rearing, and Continuity in a Religious Commune," *Journal of Family History*, Vol. 25, No. 4 [October 2000]: 491-503.)

Furthermore, Ojo (1997) focused on sexual practices and religious piety among Pentecostal groups, while Cox (1998) brought together a number of essays dealing with sexual rites among various ethnic groups. This present paper proceeds on the earlier work of Ojo with particular focus on sexual rights.

Understating the Christian Church's Position on Human Sexuality

The central concept in capturing the Christian perspective about sexuality is chastity. It is around this concept that abstinence from pre-marital sex is taught, around which healthy relationships between boys and girls is promoted, around which the value of virginity until marriage is endorsed, around which fidelity to one's spouse in sexual activity is affirmed, around which marriage and the home are regulated, and generally around which sexual rights can be expressed. Three factors have challenged the Christian Church greatly and have made it to promote a conservative tradition about sexuality.

Media

First, the construction of sex and sexuality by the contemporary media has been viewed as too permissive and a challenge to traditional Christian values. Generally, the media depict sex as free, non-inhibiting, readily available and easily obtained on a cash and carry basis. In the media, the perception is that sexual activities can be centred on fun and pleasure, that sexual activity cannot lead to any harm, and that unregulated sexual expression are part of the liberating influence of modernity. Moreover, sexual stimulations are projected as not harmful through the production of pornographic materials.

What has become paramount is the right of the individual to choose whatever she or he wants, particularly as an adult. In visual arts, in films, advertisements and in popular home video films, the print and electronic media continue to emphasize the erotic nature of sexuality and to reject any regulation about sexual behaviour. The sexual revolution in the West has relativised the morality of sex once sexual intercourse is between consenting partners and both partners derive fun from the act. In fact, by normalizing pre-marital sex, by artfully veiling the consequences of sex outside heterosexual marriage, and equally by trying to insinuate that all young people do engage in sexual activities, the Church believes that the entertainment industry has indeed played a role in the decline of traditional values about sex and sexuality.³

Secondly and arising from the above, is the belief that modern media construction of sex and sexuality is an indirect promotion of western permissive values which are contrary to both the African cultural values and Christian ethical principles that had hitherto attached some control and secrecy to sexuality. Although, the media continues to portray sex as a vehicle to self-knowledge, love and pleasure, so also Christian Churches continue to affirm that sex is allowed only within the walls of heterosexual marriage, and anything different is regarded as sinful and opprobrious.

Thirdly, there is a strong notion that contemporary evil in the society is partly associated with sexual perversion, which if left to proceed unchallenged could destabilize the society. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and early 1970s did challenge the restraint on sex, and thereafter, moral puritanism about sex, except in cases of pedophilia, ceased to be a public matter but transferred to the private domain. However, as the sexual revolution gained ground, so also did single parenthood, marriage breakdowns, teenage permanencies, and women liberation. In fact, Pentecostals believe that lesbianism, homosexuality, sexual

³ W. F. Kumuyi sharply condemned the role of the media for the decline of traditional values. W. F. Kumuyi, *Marriage: The Perfect Picture* Lagos: Zoe Publishing and Printing Company, 1988, p. 9.

pleasures for its sake, and oral sex, all of which are part of the sexual revolution, as having satanic origin. Consequently, unbridled sex assumed a religious significance from the belief that it is rooted in satanic control, and has therefore attracted the Church's opposition.

Christian Theology

Against the above background, traditional Christian theology affirms that sexuality is part of the creation and that it is fundamental to the human experience and Christian identity. To Christians, Genesis 1:26 introduces gender distinction, biological differences and the responsibility of procreation and productivity. In other passages of the Bible, procreation rather than pleasure is the aim of any sexual intercourse. Consequently the body and all its organs, and especially the sex organs, have taken on symbolic meaning of obedience or rebellion, fidelity or unfaithfulness, and the sacred or the profane. Secondly, the central notion that Christians are called to a personal morality is grounded in the biblical norm of virginity before marriage and mutual love and understanding within marriage.

Following from Apostle Paul's injunction in I Corinthians 7:1-11, the evangelical position is that every Christian is charged with a personal responsibility to chastity and to maintain the sanctity of human sexuality within a controlled space from the understanding that the body is "the temple of Holy Spirit". Overall, there is little room for personal choice in sexual expression that departs from the biblical standard. The choice available is that of conformity, not of unlimited freedom.

Teachings of the Church on Specific Aspects of Human Sexuality

Christian Churches have made a great distinction between the values of the secular society and the conservative teachings of the Church. Societal morality and values are conceived as being too accommodating, and unhelpful to Christians. For example, Kumuyi had once warned that "if the believer does not read, study and meditate on God's Word frequently enough today, ungodly counselors and Family Planning Clinics in the world are waiting to lead him astray."⁴

Certainly, sexual purity continues to be a concern to many evangelical churches as research statistics continue to reveal that more Christians are becoming sexually unfaithful. For example, in an in-depth article on sexuality and the Christian faith published in the May 2005 issue of *Christianity Today*, a popular American monthly Christian magazine, the writer, Lauren F. Winner, noted that contemporary culture is essentially an unchaste culture. Relying on statistics, he noted that about 65% of American teens have sex by the time they finish high school at the age 18, about 52% of American women have sex before turning 18, and 75% have had sex before they got married. Furthermore according to a 2000 census, the number of unmarried couples living together has increased tenfold between 1960 and 2000. Even among American Christians, recent surveys indicated that there were many cases of premarital sex among youths.⁵ Although statistics are lacking in Nigeria, current trends indicate that the situation will be similar to the United States.

Consequently, Christian churches have adopted various methods to counteract the sexual crises in the larger society and among Christians. One of such institutional oppositions comes from the American Family Association, a pro-family action group founded in 1977 and led by a Methodist minister, Don Wildmon. The American Family Association

⁴ *Complete Bible Study in One Volume*, p. 102.

⁵ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/005/34.28.html>

promotes fidelity in marriages and godly family life by using a biblical approach, and by attacking the influence of the television and other media.⁶

Premarital Sex Condemned

One major focus of the teachings of the Church has centred on the condemnation of pre-marital sex among young people. The traditional Christian perspective is that sex outside marriage amounts to sin. Without going into any theological interpretation, two Scripture verses often quoted are:

1 Corinthians 6:13, 16-20. *“Our bodies were not made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. ... Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which belongs to Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! ... Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body”*

1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8. *“For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”*

Evangelical Christians consider any sexual activity before and outside marriage as an unwholesome submission of one's body to sinful pleasures. On the other hand, it is affirmed that anyone who refrains from sexual activity before marriage submits his or her body to God. Since the 1970s, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups have conducted seminars and have prepared Bible studies to promote healthy relationships among young people and to warn them about the dangers of pre-marital sex. Young people can be friends, but no sexual cohabitation is allowed. The young Christian is constantly taught to be on guard against temptation, and every action is expected to be chaste. For example, in Deeper Life Bible Church, kissing and holding the hands of the opposite sex is not allowed.

W. F. Kumuyi, the founder and pastor of Deeper Life, observed that whenever a young man and a young woman are together their bodies must be properly clothed, and they should never be tempted to stay alone in the room particularly when the doors and windows are closed.⁷ S. G. Elton, a pioneer of Pentecostal Christianity in Nigeria and who was one of the first Pentecostals to write on human sexuality cautioned that,

Sex before marriage generally spoils courtship because that part of life tends to assume the aspect of being the most important. Be careful how you go in touching and handling one another during courtship. Touch is a wonderful

⁶ <http://www.afa.net>

⁷ W. F. Kumuyi, *Complete Bible Study Series in One Volume*, Third Edition, Zoe: Publishing and Printing Company, Limited, 1988, p. 103.

sense but it can lead to trouble if indulged in too freely and can arouse passions, which may be difficult to control.⁸

Value in Abstinence

Christian Churches further warn the young that temptation comes in various forms, and unauthorized sexual activity is part of Satan's tool to target Christians and lead them away from God. Illicit sex therefore becomes the entry point for attacks and demonic possession. Lastly, chastity is enjoined because it is a spiritual and personal moral discipline. Although sexual desire is normal, it is proclaimed that there is spiritual value in abstinence and it is one of the ways to overcome the entrapment of the world.

Folakemi Erhabor (2004) in her study of Pentecostal Movement and Adolescent Sexuality in Ile-Ife, Osun State noted a causal relationship between Pentecostal teachings and practice and adolescent's sexuality and moral life. She pointed out that the conservative church doctrines have influenced adolescents in Pentecostal churches to refrain from engaging in sexual activities and consequently preventing reproductive health hazards. Besides, she noted that Pentecostal churches through their youth-friendly activities do prepare adolescents better in grappling with their sexuality.

An institutional approach focusing mainly on young people is the **True Love Waits** programme that was begun in 1993 by the Southern Baptist Convention, a conservative evangelical group in the United States. The programme promotes abstinence from any sexual activity, and young people are made to pledge as follows: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, my friends, my future mate, and my future children to a lifetime of purity including sexual abstinence from this day until the day I enter biblical marriage relationship."⁹

The pledge places responsibility on the young people to consider their pledge as not only a personal decision but one that have implications for the family, parents, peers, and for the future generation. This program has achieved various successes among young people especially college students in the United States. This success led the Nigeria Baptist Convention in early 2005 to introduce the **True Love Waits** programme among Nigerian Baptist students as parts of its HIV awareness campaigns.

Another specific and impressive pro-life agenda and sexuality agenda for young people is presently being pursued by Bimbo Odukoya of the Fountain of Life Church founded in the 1990s in Lagos. Through her regular seminars, "Singles' Fellowship", sermons, TV broadcasts, regular column in the *City People*, Pastor Odukoya has tried to develop a sexuality agenda for Christian youths that excludes sexual cohabitation before marriage.¹⁰ In most of her sermons and writings, she has warned that any sexual activity instead of expressing love and pleasures, often turn out to be a trap among the unmarried or that it goes with dire consequences. Besides, she is also providing a restoration programme for those who have been victimized and battered in relationships that have been built on sexual pleasures outside marriage. Her recent book, *How to Choose a Life Partner, 165 Questions to Ask* (2004) is one of the ways she is impacting her programme on relationship and love to the larger society.

⁸ *Heralds of the Last Days*, a Christian publication published by S. G. Elton, n.d., No 31, p. 11.

⁹ <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw/>

¹⁰ In one of her articles, she wrote 'God, the creator of heaven and earth abhors any sexual relationships outside marriage and counts this act as Adultery: a sin that invokes His wrath and judgement'

Likewise, the late Pastor Chris Tayo Orodiji of the Baptist Student Ministries through his seminars and books promoted a conservative evangelical tradition on sexuality by championing relationships that are free from sexual intimacy, as a means to achieving a healthy sexuality.

Bimbo Odukoya, Tayo Orodiji, W. F. Kumuyi, S. G. Elton, among other Christian pastors, have rejected any notion of safe sex involving the use of condoms or any contraceptive device. They all insist that young women must know how not to lift up their skirts and young men must know how not to unzip their trousers until marriage. Therefore the only prescription to safe sex they give is abstinence.

Marriage and the Home

Marriage and the home continue to be two major areas of concern for evangelical Christians, and this is reflected in the teaching on the subject. For example, the Nigerian Charismatic movements have created elaborate regulations on marriage and family life. By and large, Pentecostals are concerned for the ways in which the marriages and sexual expressions of their members influence spirituality within the movements. Although, Pentecostals are concerned about the whole areas of sexuality, marriage and parenting, however, more books have been written on marriage than on any other area.

S. G. Elton in the late 1970s stressed the importance of the Christian family because, to him, it was becoming the target of the enemy's attacks that has planned to cause disunity in the Christian family and Christian churches.¹¹

Likewise, W.F. Kumuyi, wrote that

We must be different from the world in our marriages.... In our marriages we must take care that we are not conforming to the world. Christian marriage is the most precious relationship in life. It is the only thing that parallels the relationship between Christ and the church.

Consequently, Evangelicals and Pentecostals have tried to construct a marriage pattern that is different from the contemporary society norms. The extent of this pietistic concern is reflected in the reported cases of some church leaders who in recent times have tried to regulate the type of wedding dresses brides can wear into the church for the solemnization ceremonies. Many publications have emanated from Evangelicals and Pentecostals on this aspect. A bulleted summary of the evangelical position on marriage can be made thus:

- That marriage is a God-ordained institution and that all humans must marry.
- That in the choice of future partners one must insist on biblical standard of marrying Christians within the church. Inter-faith marriage is not allowed, while some discourage inter-church marriages.
- That only monogamous relationship is allowed, and as such polygamy is condemned. In this regard, Evangelicals and Pentecostals have promoted a higher status for women and have empowered their sexual rights by insisting on monogamous marriages.
- That the wife should be obedient and must submit completely to the husband, while the husband must love the wife as the Bible commands. Family responsibilities must be mutually shared. This perspective has lifted the status of women to be equal partners in marriages.

¹¹ S. G. Elton, *Herald of the Last Days*, No 39, p. 10.

- That sexual relationship should be confined within marriage to the exclusion of others. Each should not deny the other any sexual intimacy unless for important reasons such as health and spiritual discipline of fasting and prayer. However, there is no agreement on the use of artificial family planning methods. For example, Kumuyi insisted on natural means only, and has spoken against frequent sexual intercourse.¹² Catholics also do not accept contraceptives, while other Christians see nothing wrong with artificial birth control. In this regard, it is unlikely that any woman can exercise her reproductive rights without the consent of the husband.
- That marriage is a lifetime covenant, and divorce is not allowed. Abusive relationships are dealt with through counseling by pastors. Separation and divorces are not considered as godly choices.
- Parenting is within heterosexual marriage, and single parenthood is regarded partly the result of a sinful lifestyle, and Christians must distance themselves from this practice in whatever disguise. In this regard, most Evangelicals consider single parenthood as a manifestation of sinful lifestyle.

Without a doubt, evangelical Christianity has promoted sexuality education from the biblical point of view that affirms genuine love, caring and mutual respect.

Abortion

In the matter of abortion and reproductive rights, evangelical Christians and Catholics have promoted a pro-life value and have totally been opposed to the pro-choicers and their institutional agenda of sexual rights that include abortion. The Church's theology of life affirms the dignity and sanctity of life, and considers abortion as fuelling a culture of violence and death. Abortion could be regarded as an unfinished creative act, negative in intent and value. Unless it is a spontaneous abortion, otherwise called miscarriage, or carried out to save the life of the mother, the Church believes that it is totally unacceptable as an alternative to overcoming unwanted pregnancy. In addition, unmarried men and women are not allowed to use contraceptive methods for whatever reason, because as a Christian writer puts it that amounts to promoting illicit sex.

A Catholic faithful writing on the pro-life legacy of Pope John Paul II in *The Guardian* of April 24, 2005 stressed the Catholic teaching on sexuality and the condemnation of abortion. He argued that many NGOs in Nigeria have colluded with foreign multi-national organizations to encourage Nigerian women to kill their unborn babies in the disguise of reproduction rights. Consequently, according to the writer, 'the concept of reproductive health and rights is one of the abusive euphemisms by the United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA), Planned Parenthood Associations, Pro-choices, and some Nigerian NGO to undo Africa and Nigeria.'¹³ He further wrote that the notion of safe sex usually by the use of condom is a means of indulging in immoral casual sex. It promotes the pleasure of sex but avoids talking about the consequences. If the western agenda is promoted, the fear is that it will destroy the fabric of our traditional social order. According to him 'Sex is always safe between properly married and faithful couples.'¹⁴

Similarly, evangelical Christians generally rule out the fact that young people can be sexually active and can express their sexuality in whatever ways they want. In fact, the

¹² Kumuyi, *Marriage: the Perfect Picture*, p. 30.

¹³ *The Guardian* April 24, 2005 p. 30

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 30.

Nigerian Baptist Convention in a recent publication even rules out the use of condoms as an alternative to chastity.¹⁵

Lastly, despite the expansive rights for homosexuals since the 1970s, conservative evangelical stand is still greatly opposed to homosexual lifestyle. Although, homosexuality has not been a serious issue for public debate in Nigeria, it is clear that the Christian Church in Nigeria affirms the same conservative tradition it has maintained against pre-marital and extra-marital sex. For example, the intervention of the Nigerian Anglican Communion in the controversy over the consecration on November 2, 2003 of Canon Gene Robinson, an active homosexual, as bishop coadjutor of the diocese of New Hampshire, USA clearly indicates this. Few hours after the consecration, Peter Akinola, the Archbishop and Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) described it as unacceptable and that an overwhelming majority of the Primates in the Global South will not recognize the office or ministry of Gene Robinson as a bishop.

The Nigerian press reported the support of other conservative evangelicals for the action taken by the Nigerian Anglican Primate to distance the Nigerian Church from the Western liberal view. For example, *This Day* newspaper on November 5, with reference to the consecration of Robinson, reported that a Baptist leader in Northern Nigeria, Rev. Nathan Nwachukwu, has lauded the Nigerian Anglican Church for taking a strong stand and championing the campaigns against the ordination of homosexuals into the Christian ministry. Likewise, the support of Sunday Ola-Makinde, the Methodist Archbishop of Abuja and John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria to the Nigerian Anglican position were reported. The Methodist Archbishop even threatened that the African Church will even boycott the World Council of Churches anytime a gay priest or bishop is found in attendance.

Furthermore, Archbishop Peter Akinola of Nigeria was quoted as saying that ‘there could be no compromise over homosexuality because “it is clearly outlawed by the Bible”’. Likewise, Tunde Adeleye, the Anglican Bishop of Calabar, Nigeria said that homosexuals ‘were worse than animals in the forest’. The Lagos *Guardian* of October 19, 2003 equally reported the strong words of the bishop that homosexual behaviour ‘is devilish and satanic. It comes directly from the pit of hell. It is an idea sponsored by Satan himself and being executed by his followers and adherents who have infiltrated the church’.

The premise of the position of the Anglican Communion in rejecting homosexual behaviour, same sex marriages and the appointment of gay priests as bishops can be summarized thus:¹⁶

- (1) That homosexuality and homosexual practice from the scriptural perspective is sinful and condemnable. It added that ‘while arguments in the West for decriminalizing homosexuality is supposedly based on Science, we would want to base our position on scriptures, which for us is definitive and primary’.
- (2) That the Nigerian Church is not championing an insignificant minority view created from cultural biases but the view of a majority which has been held unceasingly for centuries by the Church. Hence, it is unkind to accuse the leaders of the Nigerian Anglicans as suffering from homophobia.

¹⁵ Nigerian Baptist Convention, *Policies and Practice* (Ibadan, 2005).

¹⁶ For more details, see my earlier article on the controversy. Matthews A. Ojo ‘The Anglican Crackup: The View from Lagos’, *Religion in the News*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 2003. Internet edition <http://www.trinoll.edu/depts/crspl/RINVol6No3/viewfromlagos.doc.htm>

- (3) That a satanic, secularist, materialistic, self-centered spirit was behind the acceptance of homosexual practice and its promotion by certain Western Christians.
- (4) That the church accepts and will minister to homosexuals, if they see themselves as having fallen short of biblical and Christian standards and seek repentance.
- (5) That the current homosexual debate is an attack on the Church, which if not strongly resisted will pollute the Church and weaken its power to preach the Gospel to a permissive society.
- (6) That marriage as instituted in the Scriptures is between a man and a woman. Anything besides this is a perversion of God's instruction and an assault on the sovereignty of God.

Buried behind the news headlines and captions is the pietistic culture which is becoming endemic in Nigerian Christianity as a result of the Evangelical revival which began in the late 1960s and the Charismatic Renewal which began in the 1970s. For example, within the Anglican Communion in Nigeria, the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Church (EFAC), a revivalist group, has been in the forefront of promoting the pietistic and conservative evangelical agenda for some years.

Furthermore, the practice of same sex marriages and homosexual relations is strongly condemned in many African societies, and particularly in the Yoruba society, Akinola's ethnic group. Hence, one of the positions of the Nigerian Anglican Church is that the normative Nigerian cultural view on human sexuality is that of a man and woman entering into sexual activity through heterosexual marriage. Even despite the intrusion of Western values, this cultural view still strongly persists among Christians and non-Christians in the African society.

During the homosexual controversy, it became clear that the Nigerian Church was not going to accept the Western liberal position of redefining what Christians believe about sexuality that will make it compatible to values of the permissive society. In fact, it was clear that the Western view that supports homosexual relations was demonized as a Satanic attack on the Christian church

Conclusion: Implications of the Church' Teaching on Sexual Rights

This paper has examined Nigerian Christian Churches' approach to sexuality from a conservative biblical point of view. The first part has dwelt on the ideological framework that determines what informs any religious group to legislate on sexual expression – whether to conform to the traditional conservative norms or adopt a deviant sexual lifestyle. Thereafter, a comprehensive view of the teaching on sexuality by Evangelical and Pentecostal churches was attempted. The underlying principle is that while choices are made available, the overwhelming influences have been to affirm a theology of life; hence, high ethical standards are set for Christians as a way of distancing themselves from the values of the secular society.

Secondly, Christian churches insist that the creative activities involved in sexual relations must be done within the confines of the sacred space established by Scriptures, endorsed by long standing evangelical tradition and promoted by the Church over the ages.

Sexual expression continues to receive attention because as a Christian writer puts it, 'the Bible sees sexual intercourse as total submission, total nakedness, total unity, total love, and total sexual satisfaction within marriage'. To evangelical Christians, sexual rights

could only be exercised in godly manner as prescribed by the Church and not the society. Although, cultural attitudes including religion still largely influence the role and status of women in the Nigerian society, the Church's proclamation of 'abundant life' in the Gospel must be reflected in the enhancement of the sexual rights of women on equal basis as men wherever such rights have been violated since both gender were created in the image of God.

Consequently, it is necessary for the Church do separate motherhood from womanhood in such a way that the status of women can be enhanced and that women can exercise their individuality and creativity in the sphere of sexuality.

Sexual rights, broadly speaking, include the ability to maintain personal preferences regarding whatever ways one exercises his or her sexual feeling in order to attain a high standard of sexuality including the pursuit of a satisfying safe and pleasurable sexual life, and the decision to enter into sexual relations and marriage willfully. Within this premise, each man and woman determines what is best for him or her regarding sexual expression.

However, the position of the Christian Church tends to moderate individual choices with the insistence that personal choices must be made within the context of the group tradition and expectation. While affirming sexual health within the premise of its theology of life, the Church teaches that sexual rights must be exercised in very responsible manner. In this regard, it is debatable if Christian Churches accept and respect the sexual rights of members, despite the fact that evangelical position does not regard any of the regulations discussed in this paper as curtailing members' freedom of choice. The evangelical position is that these regulations are promoting a keen awareness of the responsibilities attached to whatever choices are made in the manner one exercises one's sexual expression.

In fact, the traditional evangelical position considers Genesis 2:17 and Deuteronomy 30:15-20¹⁷ as clearly affirming individual choice to obtain life and to pursue happiness. In these verses, the good and right ways are brought near and plainly revealed. The difference from the secular freedom is that the Bible and Christian Churches often place before Christians the knowledge of good and evil that will enhance whatever choice is made. The Bible gives freedom of choice but there are always consequences.

The Scriptures warn of dire consequences in making a wrong choice. Accordingly, good choices result in divine blessing, happiness and total well being, while wrong choices bring untold misery. Although, contemporary human rights may question this coercion to choose good, i.e. to tow the conservative position on controlled sexuality, Evangelicals insist that this is the only way to empower individuals to experience well being and meaningful sexuality.

¹⁷ The full text read thus "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them. I declare to you this day, that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land which you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days, that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

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