

Contemporary Sexuality Dilemma in the Church

Serah Madiiga Kitsiiri

Abstract - Homosexuality has existed for years now. The bible gives us several hints that homosexuals do exist. However the issue that has been escalating in the contemporary society is the fact that the church is torn in between; to accept and accommodate this community or to expel them once they are discovered. However, some churches are already seen making progress towards accepting and accommodating homosexuality to an extent that some of their priests are allowed to be homosexuals. The turn of events in Kenya which have seen the homosexuality community take matter in the courts as they carry out their demonstrations on the streets implies an awakening time for the push of its legalization. This paper empirically discusses the contemporary sexuality dilemma in the church.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Gay, Lesbian, Church, Sexuality, Dilemma and intersex

I. INTRODUCTION

Most of the time than often, the society has perceived the church to be a source of inspiration, transformation and an institution that guides an individual towards the right path to God. The society, for long has gone back to the church to ask questions that are deemed to be particularly pointing towards the sacred code of conduct referred to as Christian ethics. However, things seem to be getting out of hand due to modernization that is taking place in the society. We have seen questions that point towards the effectiveness of the church in response to the contemporary issues that are not in line with what the society perceives to be Christian ethics. For instance, the church has faced the test on corruption, abortion, drug abuse and more serious sexuality related issues, among others. Civilization, a concept that has characterized the contemporary society is coupled with confusion and uncertainty from the holders of traditional values of Christianity, but is a comfort zone for those who propone it. Among the issues that civilization has brought about is the dynamics of sexual orientation (Nilson, 2001).

Sexuality is a concept that is wide and sometimes complex depending on the individual's perspective. Scientists and religious scholars have given their own views on sexuality and it has raised questions on how and why some issues are the way they are. Just as Christianity, science has not harmonized the aspect of homosexuality. Even though science and religion have differed on a number of occasions on various issues, science has given religion in this case a point to debate on homosexuality (Nicholasi, 1994). However, for a long time, Christians have held a perspective that sexuality is a gift from God and therefore sacred. Furthermore, sexuality has always been understood to be an element of procreation, and should just therefore be contained within the marriage triangle only. In this case, a man is meant

to marry a woman and the two stay together as a husband and wife. However, from the beginning, the bible presents a challenge where human beings are not working in line with God's plan of sexuality. The case of Sodom and Gomorrah which presented the issue of homosexuality was presented to us in the Old Testament but has gained mileage in contemporary society. The ultimate price of a Christian is the reward of eternal life which the bible warns (1 Corinthians 6:9-10) that among the people who will not inherit the Kingdom of God are homosexuals. The worrying fact in the contemporary society is the aspect where the church is falling into the trap of homosexuality. Talking about matters of homosexuality on the pulpit during this 21st century is becoming more difficult, especially in churches whose members are below 45 years of age. Churches and spiritual leaders have differed greatly on the aspect of homosexuality with some terming it as an abomination and some saying that it should be understood that people were created differently. Validity of their arguments cannot be gauged on the basis one's beliefs but rather what the guiding principles of Christianity postulate.

II. THE PROBLEM

Homosexuality for a long time was widely known as an issue that was done underground and most of the people who participated in it would not wish to be recognized. Perceived as an issue that only affected the west, the phenomenon has knocked to the door of Africa and resisting it is becoming an issue. The membership of homosexual community involves both church adherents and their leaders including priests and pastors, whom most of them are characterized with fear and silence. The problem is articulating the issues related to their sexual orientation and coming out clearly is challenging because they fear the reaction from the society. It is imperative to note that some homosexuality activists, homosexual community itself and even the homosexuals' sympathizers are church members somewhere making it easy for them to push their agenda even beyond the secular walls to the church. Cushioned with the caption "Rights of homosexuals" their agenda is getting in the church at a high rate and to an extent that is somehow alarming. Apart from South Africa, Kenya has been deemed to be another African country where homosexuality is gaining ground (Kohut, 2013). The traditionalists hold that this is not the way to go but the pro-homosexuals are making their point well known by pushing their agenda. Using empirical review method, this paper therefore assess the position of the church in Kenya on the aspect of homosexuality as a contemporary issue that is gaining its leverage even on the pulpit where some priests and pastors are pushing for reformation, thus posing a dilemma.

III. THE CURRENT STATE

Contemporary society has experienced the church take a different stance on matters of sexuality. Homosexuality has already been supported by a section of the church and even in those churches that still oppose it, some splinter groups have been witnessed. Christianity today is becoming more complicated as more varied views on different issues emerge depending on different schools of thought, varied biblical interpretations and cultural beliefs with traditional beliefs of a religion. Through such a background, the debate on homosexuality found its way in the church. In the year 1946, a Bishop of Eucharistic Catholic Communion presided over a mass of gay celebration which took place in Atlanta. Another church, One Brotherhood Church was established in Los Angeles by an activist for gay rights. In the year 1968, Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches became the first gay and transgender denomination. It is worth noting that even though some churches may not be directly and openly subscribing to the ideas of homosexuality, they still welcome the homosexuals in their congregation and such are referred to as “welcoming churches.”

In Africa, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa subscribes to the fact that marriage should be between a man and a woman but also recognizes and ordains priests who are of the same sexual orientation. In the same line, those that are gay or lesbians are allowed in the church when they conduct their marriage under the civil law. The Methodist church of Southern African accepts a relationship between same sex, with the condition that the relationship is not in form of marriage. Another church in Southern Africa is the Dutch Reformed church which allows the congregation to make their own decision on whether or not a gay may become a minister (Collison, 2016). United Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa allows each minister to exercise his or her own freedom on matters of same sex relationships (Rickard, 2016). The above churches in the African context are all from South Africa where the law permits homosexuality.

The case of Bishop Desmond Tutu, who is also dubbed to be a homosexual activist gives the picture of the church is engulfed in the defense of homosexuality. At one point, Bishop Tutu was stated that he was ashamed to be an Anglican due to the fact that the Anglican Church was against the rights of homosexuals. He further shocked the African church when he came out and apologized in the year 2001 on behalf of homosexual community. This was in response to what the youth, women and men who had gone to the streets in the same year to protest for the violation their rights by the church despite the fact that the constitution protects homosexuals. Later, in 2011, Bishop Tutu called for the Anglican Church in Southern Africa to accept and conduct same sex marriages with no conditions (Tutu, 2011).

Almost similar a stance was taken by Bishop Christopher Senyonjo of Uganda and the director St. Paul Reconciliation and Equity Center. Sharing through Amnesty International You tube channel, the Bishop indicates that he

was amused when he met a homosexual who told him that he had been discriminated everywhere he went. In his response, the Bishop first assured the individual that God loved him. He further opines that homosexuals should be preached to receive salvation without pointing towards their orientation. His final remarks were to call the church to understand and act towards the rights of such an individual daily as Amnesty international puts it (Senyonjo, 2013).

IV. THE DILEMMA POSE: THE TRUTH IN DISGUISE

One of the factors that the proponents of Homosexuality are using to propel their agenda in the church is the use of the biblical stance that helps to wave their flag. It is worth noting that humankind has studied the bible for long and each one of them comes up with his or her own conclusion. Depending on how one understands the bible, we have seen the emergence of different denominations and cults that justify their existence on the basis of biblical understanding. This gives a glimpse of how the holy book has sometimes been used to serve personal interests. In the same line, the homosexual community is pushing for the scriptural reinterpretation in order to accommodate them. They are using the same bible that those who stand against homosexuality have used (Lee, 2012).

The first trick that is applied by the proponents of homosexuality in the church is based on the fact that the bible posits that there is no one who is righteous and all of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23) and therefore we all live by God’s grace. It should be understood that this is absolute truth which the bible puts across since, the world we are living in is full of crimes, temptations and tests of all sorts. Furthermore, the bible calls us to a life of repentance daily. In such a case, we would all admit that we live in a manner sin finds its ways into us. This gives the homosexuality proponents a basis of argument and justification that, since we have all sinned, regardless of the sin, we all can repent and move on with life. Applying the truth in this context can be a vital way of reaching a conclusive point that would either permit the compromise state or the state of refusal (Cornwall, 2011).

In the same line, the fact that the bible calls us to unity regardless of our diversity lays a ground that has favored the homosexual community within the church to push for their agenda. The bible has a lot of scriptures that point towards the unity of believers. Since their main issue is acceptability and accommodation in the church, the group argues that locking them out is going against the biblical grounds of unity. Arguing that there are very many conflicts in the church that the church leaders have moved with speed to lay a ground that foster unity. Proponents of homosexuality in the church argue that the church should also move with speed to understand their innocence and unify them with the rest of the congregation. However, most of the time, the church leadership has been blamed of taking care of other issues while isolating those issues that are related to homosexuality.

Being the duty of the church to bring together everybody, the complexity of homosexuality has given it a difficult time and even those who may be for the idea are silently dying with it (Cornwall 2011; Leong, 2006).

For a long time, the controversial issue in Christianity which has been a debate and subject of reformation according to some people is the issue that the bible was written by human authors and therefore contains a lot of mistakes. Such speculations and arguments have given an upper hand for the groups that are pushing for recognition of homosexuals in the church. Basing their argument on the fact that the bible has numerous mistakes, they posit that even areas that harshly condemn them should be revised. Opining that the people who wrote the bible may not have understood how to express their issues, there might also have been a failure to understand that some things would change with time. They therefore, say that some verses were put in the bible without understanding that people are born differently with different perspectives yet all are God's creation. In their understanding, God loves everyone and never discriminates. This is unlike the way the bible at some point writes in a harsh language towards some groups of individuals who portray different characteristics. In the same line, they debate the fact that the history of the bible indicates that some books were to be included in the bible and some were to be removed is an indication that the bible may not be perfect. Furthermore, they question why this was the case and what basis was used to determine the scriptures to be included in the bible and those that were not suitable and those that were suitable. Basing on this therefore, they opine that the bible can still be revised as it was done during the time of its establishment so that it can strike a balance of all groups including the marginalized ones, like homosexuals (Melissa, 2002).

All the aforementioned issues that cause or give the homosexual group the ease to push their agenda in the church is not actually the main issue that is at stake for their defense. One of the fundamental teachings in the bible is that we are all created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). In this regard therefore, homosexuals are still God's creation as any other person. The debate that has vindicated Christians who are against homosexuality is that, those who engage in sexual affairs with a partner who is of the same sex is led by lust and pervasiveness. However, Christians are caught up in a limbo when it comes to explaining how the intersex person should be treated and which kind of partner they should have. This state therefore has given the homosexual community a voice where they claim that God created everything beautiful and for a reason, He knows and loves everyone despite what humankind thinks. Spiritual leaders have been challenged to give their opinion about such circumstances but they have only remained in a dilemma (Kaoma, 2014).

V. CRAWLING IN CHURCH: FROM THE STREETS TO COURT AND THE VICIOUS CYCLE DEEMED TO BREAK AFTER SUCCESS

Scholars have tried to establish the relationship that exists between religion and the state. Some have opined that religion controls the state while some say the state is and should remain superior over the church and this is the position that is supported most. The reason why this position is supported by most is because religion is deemed to take away the freedom of people through pinning them on principles that are not necessarily the right way of life. Also, the state is controlled and protected by the constitution which at any point can be revised to suit the changes coming along unlike religion which is pegged on books deemed to be sacred and therefore cannot be altered even with the changing world (Aernout, 2012).

As discussed earlier, some churches around the globe have softened their stand on homosexuality slowly by slowly, and as the courts legalized it, they came out and stood with the decision of the court and now they are even presiding over same sex marriages. Similarly in Kenya, some sections of church membership at a point have been seen to loosen their nuts on the issue, appearing at one point to be giving a leaning shoulder for the homosexual community. Kenya has experienced massive protests and lamentations from Gay and Lesbian Coalition of Kenya (GALCK), an umbrella group that holds all the agendas of the homosexual community. Among the churches that have given the homosexual community a landing ground is the Sunday congregation of Cosmopolitan Affirming Church whose membership claim that God is worshipped by everyone who believes in him and it's only Him who has the final say not men (Bearak, 2019).

The implications of the church being subject to the state points towards it yielding on what the state wants and not the other way round, in this case through imposition of law. The church may seem independent of the law but the reality is that, it prevails over it. It is worth noting that some of the people pushing the homosexuality agenda in Kenya are well known believers, some who hold leadership positions in the church and have accepted the fate of the situation. This implies that that the church is getting in the middle of the discussion. Considering the fact that the only problem that the homosexual community faces is coming out and accepting their state, those who have accepted are vital and a voice of expression. After acceptability, some priests and pastors come out clearly to defend the fact that they have lived in silence for long and yet they are part of the homosexual community. But it must be understood that before it reaches this stage, everything begins with one person who mobilizes and sensitizes others to fight for their freedom. Taking in consideration the freedom of expression and picketing, organized groups would now move to the streets to make their voice heard. Later, they would seek the attention of the court which most of the time seems to be shy of such ideas. Picketing and going to court never stops for such groups of individuals who make their activities resemble a vicious cycle. However, it is worth noting that those who serve in the courts have different perspectives on everything and therefore, with continued push, legalization through changing the law

becomes the end product. The current constitution of Kenya prohibits homosexuality but the reality is that the court has the final decision (Mbote *et al*, 2018).

During the 2019 census, Kenya accepted the fact that there are three genders namely; male, female and lastly intersex which was included for the first time. The results revealed that at least 1534 people were established to be intersex. The fact that intersex people may fear to identify themselves openly suggests that the number may be higher than estimated. The homosexual community in Kenya has complained of being left in the cold with the fear of hostility from the people who are anti-homosexuality in the church. Finding a way to express themselves is one thing but being accepted is another. Initially, the discussion of whether homosexuality is right or wrong in the African society never existed. However, the contemporary society has seen this debate escalate. Honestly, the traditional Christians are getting out of the picture with time and the generation that is deemed to be modern and civilized is taking over the leadership of both the state and the church.

In the year 2015, Kenya witnessed a scenario where three Anglican priests serving in three different regions were associated with gays. However, they were suspended but to show that that was just part of the fight that was to last, they took the case to court. In the year 2017, the Labour Court reinstated them to their priestly duties but the demonstrations held by the people who were against their coming back meant that they would not access their respective places of ministry. This however implied that the fight would just intensify because more of those who were hiding found strength to come out. Later on, the Anglican Church accepted that it cannot chase away any member and it welcomes everybody but it including homosexuals but it cannot exercise weddings for same gender partners in the church (Kajilwa and Otino, 2019).

The Catholic Church faces different cases though still pointing towards the problem of homosexuality in the church, there have been allegations pointing towards catholic priests being involved in sexual affairs with the boys. This has been a global issue since priests in the Catholic Church adhere to the celibacy call, a fact that makes them be around boys than girls most of the time. In January 2018, a priest was accused of having sexual relationship with a boy that was found in his house. The priest and the boy later confessed to have been involved in the act of sex (VOA, 2018).

In recent times, not only male church leaders have come out as gays but also women in top church leadership are coming out and encouraging others to come out and speak their mind. Evangelist Nzilani, a woman who has been in ministry for long says she never got attracted to men even though she got married for about 25 years after being forced into marriage by her mother. Even after all these years in marriage with three children, Nzilani claims that she ended up marrying a fellow woman after the death of her husband in 2008. In her confession, she confirms that the woman she is in

love with is a fellow evangelist whom she says was also married but unhappy. The story of Nzilani and her partner is a mirror that reflects the mileage the homosexual community is covering in making its story known and accepted by fellow Christians in the church (Owiti, 2019).

VI. CONCLUSION

The problem in this case is whether the church should entertain homosexuality as the reality is that the homosexuality agenda is being pushed so hard and branded as a right for an individual. As the church in Kenya continues to debate on acceptability and accommodation status of homosexuals, the more the strength the homosexual community gains, thus extending their mileage. As time goes by, the stance of traditionalists continues to fade and the proponents of homosexuality continue to gain ground. Leadership position in both the church and state are being taken over by the youthful generation whose perspective on societal issues is different. In the wake one decade from now, the language will be different from what is being said today. The homosexual community will no longer be seeking for acceptance and accommodation in the church but will rather be planning on how to be part of the larger picture in the society. Furthermore, with the acceptance of the third gender in Kenya, the church is pushed to the wall of accepting that defining sexuality is complex since intersex individuals may not get married if the stance of the church remains the same. Finally the church has lost the identity of preaching the pure gospel and preaching prosperity and compromise. This is another avenue through which homosexuals are pushing their agenda since they understand that supporting their churches with the resources they have will help them be accepted and accommodated.

The three issues discussed above imply that the church is caught up in a limbo where the law, the introduction of third gender by the state and the aspect of prosperity gospel puts it in a dilemma which eventually the homosexual community gains upper hand.

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