

# Emotive or Ethical? A Theological Reflection on Kenya's Comprehensive Sexuality Education

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## Abstract

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) has been lauded as a more inclusive, rights-based, and progressive approach to sexuality, particularly in its assumed impact on youth sexuality in Kenya. An emotive approach is proposed by both protagonists and antagonists of CSE. This article, however, seeks to ground the discussion on a theological and ethical approach, by way of utilizing a customized practical theological methodology. First, it utilizes inter-disciplinary methods to analyze the CSE policy in Kenyan society. Second, its normative aspect is grounded in a theological reflection on the sexual ethics espoused in key New Testament passages. Third, its practical recommendations explore the ramifications of this research for sexual ethics in youth and

family ministries and public theological engagement with Kenya's society.

## 1. Sexuality and Sex Education: An Introduction

Sexuality is central to what it means to be human persons created in the image of God. Sexuality, which involves physical, biological, psychological, emotional, and even spiritual aspects, is a topic that finds resonance in the biblical text from Genesis to Revelation. We see this in the one-flesh union between Adam and Eve, the sexual abuses and excesses in the narratives of Lot (Sodom and Gomorrah), Dinah, and Tamar in the Pentateuch, the romantic and sexual imagery of the Song of Songs, the counsel on sexual ethics in the Wisdom

## Keywords

Adolescent reproductive and sexual health, Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Practical Theology, Public Theology, youth and family ministry

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Literature, Jesus's ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul's engagement with Greco-Roman sexual practices, as well as the warnings in the book of Revelation. The Bible is not as *squeamish* as we are concerning the subject of sex and contains sufficient material when it comes to discussing sex in a very frank and open manner (Smith 2014, xii). The biblical text contains various approaches to sexuality education. Throughout their different genres, biblical passages have ample information on the general topic of sexuality, as well as assuming and prescribing various ethical duties in the area of sexuality.

Within the Kenyan context, sexuality education has been approached from several angles. Traditional sexuality education is the education on sexuality that has been handed down through the various African traditional religions and cultures in Kenya. These types of sexuality education are centered around taboos, rituals, community harmony, and appropriate sexual relations. The second approach, usually lumped together with the traditional approach, can be understood as sexuality education emanating from the various religions of Kenya, the two most common being Christianity and Islam. These approaches to sexuality education, which derive their sources of knowledge from religious texts, can be termed conservative sexual ethics. *Conservative* is used to delineate their focus on ethical norms and appeals to special revelation. In some cases, the word conservative is used in a derogatory manner to mean *backward* or *retrogressive*.

The third approach is Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). CSE is seen as a more progressive approach to sexuality education. This approach moves beyond the taboos of traditional sexuality education and conservative sexuality education by tackling contemporary sexuality issues that are a central part of Kenyan society. These include aspects such as early teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender minorities (LGBTQIA+),

Gender-based violence, contraception, and safe sexual expression. Much of the literature assumes that CSE is more progressive, and many make emotive appeals, stating that it is a better approach to sexuality education in a country that is marked by high teenage pregnancy rates, early exposure to sexual activities, as well as an increasing focus on gender minority and gender rights discourses (KNBS and ICF 2023, 16). This study surveys the history of CSE in the country and the key issues raised through this approach to sexuality education. The rest of the article investigates the policy formulations supporting CSE within the Kenyan context and highlights the ethical issues raised and why a biblical theological approach is needed in the conversation.

## **2. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the Kenyan Context**

CSE in Kenya, as in other countries such as Ghana, Peru, and Guatemala, has wide support at the national and international policy levels. Kenya, for example, has signed various international agreements such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), the Cairo Programme of Action (1994), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), and the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (2001) (Panchaud et al. 2019, 285). Some national policies in the area of Adolescent Sexuality and Reproductive Health include the Adolescent Reproductive Health Development Policy (2003), National Guideline for the Provision of Youth-Friendly Services (2005), Education Sector Policy on HIV and AIDS, Second Edition (2013), and National Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy (2015) (Sidze et al. 2017, 17). Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is defined by UNESCO as:

A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. (UNESCO et al. 2018, 16)

CSE is therefore viewed as a positive tool for better outcomes on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights among adolescents. According to UNESCO (2018, 16), CSE aspects include formal and informal education settings, empirical data, an incremental approach, age- and developmental-appropriate perspectives, and methods that are curriculum-based, comprehensive, gender-equity-based, culturally relevant, and human-rights-centric. It is laudable that CSE seeks to address some of the worrying statistics around sexual and reproductive health. These include early teenage pregnancies, sexual and gender-based violence as well as cultural practices that hinder the sexual well-being of adolescents in many African countries. CSE is anchored in UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (UNESCO 2009), which was updated in 2018 to address more recent issues in the contemporary context. These issues include "an increased recognition of gender perspectives and social context in health promotion; the protective role of education in reducing vulnerability to our sexual health outcomes, including those related to HIV, STIs, early and unintended pregnancy and gender-based violence" as well as increased access to social and digital media (UNESCO 2018, 13).

The African Union's Maputo Protocol (2003) provided political support for implementing CSE in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa

(Wangamati 2020, 56). CSE is seen as another phase in sexuality education beyond the initial stages of focusing on biological, population, social aspects, and gender rights approaches. CSE is seen as a more engaged phase of sexuality education in the history of Kenya, having moved from the first stage (1960–1980) of biological and anatomical education to the second phase (1980–1994) of population and developmental issues to the third phase (1994–2000) of social aspects of sexuality, to the fourth phase (2000–2015) of human rights, as a key agenda in sexuality education (Panchaud et al. 2019, 281).

Wangamati (2020, 57) argues that CSE is based on a public health approach, which differs from faith-based, culture-based approaches that are moralistic and focused on preventing premarital sex. CSE took momentum following the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 and in Nairobi in 2019 (Wekesah et al. 2019, 2). The implementation of CSE in schools in Kenya has encountered some resistance, primarily on the basis of sociocultural norms among guardians as well as other pragmatic concerns in curricular implementation (Wekesah et al. 2019, 3). Various media platforms have also been used as avenues for CSE in Sub-Saharan Africa, such as *The World Starts with Me*, which was developed in Uganda and implemented in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Malawi (Wekesah et al. 2019, 5). In the Kenyan context, the primary avenue of CSE implementation is life skills education, which is a primary school platform for informal education.

Sexuality education seeks to offer knowledge and skills to cope with the various ways in which sexuality has been narrowly conceived as sex and usually with connotations of filth and dirt (Bruess and Greenberg 2004, 3; Lehmler 2017, 2). Human sexuality is therefore a broader concept than sexual acts and includes biological, ethical, cultural, psychological, and spiritual aspects that are core to human personhood (Bruess and

Greenberg 2004, 5; Lehmler 2017, 2–5). Cultural dimensions of sexuality have to do with the norms we have inherited from the context of our societies. Psychological dimensions have to do with attitudes and feelings about sexuality. Ethical dimensions include moral aspects of sexuality. Biological dimensions include anatomical aspects such as the development of sexual characteristics, responses to sexual stimuli, and reproductive organs, among others (Bruess and Greenberg 2004, 6; Lehmler 2017, 2). More recently, some scholars draw attention to the political tone discussions around the topic of sexuality have taken on, with some contexts celebrating diversity (Weeks 2022, 2). Weeks (2022, 2) portends that this political tone has led to differing views on sexuality among liberal sexual ethics and religious sexual ethics. To him, as to many others, religion is seen as a poison to the pleasure of sexual ethics.

The politicization of sexuality has also led to it featuring much more on new media and attention is often drawn to sexuality and gender rights. Because of the increasing violations of sexual minorities, scholars and policy analysts have pushed for the incorporation of LGBTQIA+ rights within the Kenyan constitution as well as calling for Africa’s “homophobia” to be addressed. Van Klinken (2019, 3), for example, observes how homophobia is pervasive in African societies. Those who are against homosexuality premise their arguments on terms such as un-African, unnatural, and un-Christian. What is interesting in van Klinken’s analysis is the absence of the Islamic view on sexuality, which is a significant religion in the African context. More recently, for instance, the World Cup officials in Qatar remained adamant concerning homosexual expression during the October-December World Cup 2022 (MacInnes 2022). For van Klinken, religious and especially Christian sexual ethics are directly correlated with homophobia and consequentially, societal discrimination and marginalization of those who identify as

homosexual. A question that remains is how to wrestle with human rights issues where all human life is safeguarded while still wisely and pastorally emphasizing the ethical dimension of sexuality. The politicization of sexuality is therefore not just limited to religious and ecclesial actors, but to a host of individuals and various groups that are pushing for their own view on the sexual ethics that is most appropriate for the Kenyan context.

## *2.1 Emotive or ethical? Situating CSE in ethical perspective*

This study seeks to explore whether champions of CSE have premised sexual education on a comprehensive ethical approach or whether it is an emotive approach that pushes its political agenda on the continent. In this section, I analyze various facets of CSE that have a direct bearing on the ethical dimensions of this approach to sexuality education.

### *2.1.1 Discrimination against sexual minorities*

The literature has noted discrimination committed against sexual and gender minorities, meaning those who do not espouse to the sexuality and gender norms of the majority population. Sexual and gender minorities have higher chances of being victims of sexual abuse, verbal insults, reduced access to government and health services, and unequal opportunities at work (Harper et al. 2021, 3). The same abuse is extended, disproportionately, towards women. For instance, global estimates acknowledge that 35% of women have faced or are at risk of physical or sexual abuse from their partners (UNESCO 2018, 23). In the literature, these issues are correlated with high levels of mental health issues, and researchers are mobilizing various social and political actors to offer

health and other services to sexual and gender minorities (Harper et al. 2021, 2; UNESCO 2018, 25).

The role of CSE is to educate Kenyan society on these minorities so as to foster their human dignity and well-being. From a theological position, this corresponds with the principle of human dignity, which is vested in all human beings because they bear the image of God. Stanley Grenz (2001, 280) applies the *imago Dei* to human sexuality, by noting that sexuality is more than the physical dimension and is central to humanity seeking wholeness. Christians have the proper foundations to ensure that the lives of all people, including sexual minorities, are safeguarded as an outworking of the commandments to love your neighbor and extend grace and patience to those who are different, especially to the minorities in our societies. Jesus's engagement with the woman at the well (John 4) is illustrative of this point.

### 2.1.2 CSE, and sexual and gender rights

Because CSE is focused on improving the knowledge and skills of young people in the areas of gender and sexual and reproductive health, the positive outcome in Kenya is that more young people are able to discern various sexual practices that are harmful to them (Panchau et al 2018). Kenya's adolescents (15–19-year-olds) have high rates of sexual exposure (KNBS and ICF 2023, 16). Whereas some of this is due to sexual expression between peers, part of it also results due to rape or sexual abuse by adults in society. Thus, CSE helps to protect especially the vulnerable members of society. The rights-based approach also promotes the individual's right to choose when, where, and with whom they "will have any form of intimate or sexual relationship" (UNESCO 2018, 18). This choice expands on abstinence by being "learner-centric" and offering young people the decision to delay or engage in sexual activity. CSE also champions safer sex

so as to foster "healthy interpersonal relationships, based on respect and communication, which may or may not involve sexual intimacy" (UNESCO 2018, 18).

### 2.1.3 Abortion rights

Premised on the high rates of sexual activity among Kenyan adolescents (aged 15–19), especially from sexual-based violence, CSE is viewed as a tool that gives young people agency when it comes to how they deal with early teenage pregnancies (Sidze et al. 2017, 7). Because of these early pregnancies, research shows that 17% of women who seek post-abortion care in public health institutions are between 10–19 years old, with 74% of moderate and severe complications arising from this age group (APHRC 2013, 18). The teaching of abortion within CSE is viewed as a key agenda in the championing of human rights. Thus, CSE proponents within the media space teach abortion as part of young people's "reproductive health, rights and choices" (Sidze et al. 2017, 39). Other analysts argue that CSE can help young people to deal with sexuality issues and thus lead to reduced unsafe abortions (Ogolla and Ondia 2019, 113).

While it is important to respect the dignity of young people, ethical responses that focus on individual human rights tend to follow Western ethical approaches that distort broader conceptualizations of ethics. For instance, Bujo (2001, 25) argues that ethics should consider more than just the individual, by also considering how the wider community is affected. For young girls who are pregnant, decisions on whether to abort or not, have direct consequences for the life they carry, their own psychological and emotional well-being, and also the young person's accountability to the community and God. If indeed God is the giver of life, then he is the one who has ultimate authority on whether or not to take life—barring special health emergency cases. In other words, an approach to the issue of abortion that narrows down its focus to the individual may lead to greater losses than gains.

### 3. Theological Approaches to Christian Sexual Ethics

From the discussion above, CSE's approach is primarily targeted toward young people, seeking to deal with the disturbing statistics regarding the violation of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights among adolescents. Further, CSE's approach to sexuality seeks to move beyond traditional approaches that are viewed as moralistic so as to foster more comprehensive approaches, that are primarily centered on human rights. The uniqueness of this article is in situating the CSE discussion at the policy level in Kenya and analyzing its ethical foundations through theological reflection on key New Testament passages.

Sexual ethics can be approached from various perspectives. The first is the natural law ethics which focuses the conversation on sexuality on natural order (Salzman and Lawler 2012, 2). This approach is popular in the Roman Catholic tradition and draws on the natural theology of Thomas Aquinas in its application to sexuality. Natural law sexual ethics are also based on Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. This approach does not rely explicitly on revelation but values the place of human reasoning to determine what is "natural, good and conducive to human flourishing" (Piderit 2011, xxiv). Written in the heyday of the sexual revolution, *Humanae Vitae* has stood as a theological testament to the beauty, truth, and goodness of sexuality within the bounds of God's natural revelation in light of contemporary issues in sexual ethics such as abortion, contraceptive pills, and other issues (Pope Paul VI and Eberstadt 2014, iv).

A second approach can be called evangelical sexual ethics. Now the term *evangelical*<sup>1</sup> has received several critiques due to its undue alliance with republican politics in the Trump era, and its silence in the face of racial injustice in, for example, America and South Africa. That said, *evangelical*, as championed by Christian ethicists, seeks to explore the biblical ramifications of sexuality, especially in its direct connection to moral living (Grenz 1997, 2). This approach views sexuality as part of God's good creation, following the arguments of the New Testament against Gnostics and upheld by the Church Fathers (Grenz 1997, 3). While reason, tradition, and the sciences are important in ethical reflection, evangelical sexual ethics views the Scripture as the normative standard for sexual ethics (Davis 2015, 3). Another way to conceive of this approach is to speak of ethics that begins with "the Lordship of the God of the Bible," which Frame (2008, 41) argues is what differentiates Christian ethics and non-Christian ethics. This study appreciates the place of natural law, particularly in its deconstruction of the shaky ground on which postmodern and relativistic ethics is founded. However, it also seeks to reflect briefly on some key passages in the biblical text and their relevance for sexual ethics in light of the CSE dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term *evangelical* can be used as a system of interpretation of Christian life and doctrine, or as a social and religious grouping. As a system, Bebbington quadrilaterally observes that an evangelical emphasis is one that is bibliocentric, christocentric, conversionist, and transformationist. For more on this, see Bebbington (2015, 87–96). As a social and religious grouping, evangelical refers to a fundamentalistic approach to religion as well as racial and political alignments, particularly within the Northern American context.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough exegetical treatment of the Bible and homosexual practices, see Gagnon (2002).

### 3.1 *New Testament sexual ethics in light of CSE*

#### 3.1.1 Gender complementarity (Matthew 19:4–6)

The New Testament corpus assumes gender complementarity. Jesus's teaching on divorce is predicated in his view of human gender as either male or female. In this passage, Jesus Christ is quoting directly from Genesis (1:27; 2:18, 21–23). These passages argue that gender is given by God, which is a contrast to the sexual ethics of CSE whereby gender is diverse, and it is up to an individual to choose which gender they identify as. While Jesus Christ is teaching about divorce, he assumes that sexual intimacy is more than mere physical expression, and that it has lasting significance within the marital context.

This concept of gender complementarity is extended by Paul in his exposition of sexual ethics in 1 Corinthians 5–7. Mutuality in marital sex is premised on sexual expression between a husband and a wife (1 Cor 7:1–4). This passage expands on what we find in some of the patriarchal cultures that tended to view women as the property of the husband; a view still found in some African cultural contexts. In New Testament sexual ethics, male and female in the context of the marital union is a reflection of God's image in humans. Paul also uses the images of mother and father to explore pastoral approaches to discipleship as both caring and firm.

In Ephesians 5:22–33, marital union is again premised on gender complementarity and Paul even cites Jesus's teaching in Matthew 19:4–6 as well as its prior injunction at the start of Genesis. What this means is that young people need biblical and pastoral guidance on the gender discussion. While acknowledging gender minorities do exist, the teaching on gender complementarity should guide our engagement with them so that we point them to God's intended design for them that would lead to human flourishing. Pro-homosexual ethicists, rather than basing their

arguments on Scripture, usually lean towards more emotive appeals. This therapeutic view of sexuality is something that has been addressed by various theologians who trace its roots back to the romantic era with its obsession with feelings, as it was influenced by figures such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Trueman 2022, 2). In his fine analysis, Trueman (2022, 11) argues that the view that moral codes are oppressive can be traced back to Marx and Nietzsche. While feelings are part and parcel of human life, they must be interpreted and informed by God's wisdom.

#### 3.1.2 Freedom or Scripture: Sexuality by which norms? (John 8:31–32)

The Church's response to LGBTQIA+ rights is often muddled by the political, social-cultural, psychological, and spiritual aspects of LGBTQIA+ realities. Acknowledging that sexual and gender minorities are created in the image of God offers us bridges to engage with them, and to seek their well-being. However, such a grace-centered approach should not ignore the truth. The truth is central to the concept of human rights and freedoms. Liberal sexual ethicists usually argue that conservative sexual ethics are backward. Liberal sexual ethicists challenge conservatives to widen their affirmation of sexual activity and gender identities to a level that is at odds with the Scriptures. However, by critiquing conservative sexual ethics as backward, they hold their own prescriptions on the discourse as the normative standard. Further, by making appeals to human rights and freedoms, they forget that such appeals are philosophically based on some objective standard on the sources of rights and freedoms. If sexual ethics is socially constructed, as the deontological ethicists argue, how can societies ever come to a settled agreement on what is constitutive of human rights?

By appealing to human rights, ethicists are implicitly assuming an objective moral standard. If so, the question remains, where does this standard come from? If reason, tradition, culture, and feelings are the sources, then what is clear is that they are not normative sources as they change over time due to the diversity of the human experience. The argument from moral law portends that our moral duties assume a moral law, and a moral law, assumes a moral-law Giver. This is the basis for normativity in ethical discussions such as this. In this discussion, the question is not whether ethical norms for sexuality are there, the question is, What are their sources?

The view of this article is that the characteristics of Scripture qualify it to be an ultimate norm for ethics: for it is unchanging, supra-cultural, timeless, corresponding to reality, and leading to ultimate transformation, from the inside out. In John 8:31–32, as in the entire Johannine corpus, the gospel writer assumes that objective truth exists, that truth is embodied in the person of Jesus, and that truth brings transformation. According to Jesus, freedom is not living as people wish, but it is living in light of God's good design for humanity. For the context of this study, it is living in light of God's design for gender and sexuality. In fact, people's continued practice of sexual sin reveals that they have not experienced the freedom that is found in Jesus and remain in slavery (John 8:34).

### 3.1.3 Sexual sin and true sexual healing (Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11)

CSE seeks to delink sexuality from ethical norms, an exercise that is self-defeating because CSE seeks to proscribe different sexual ethics. This article argues that sexuality education cannot avoid ethical discussion because it is inherently ethical in nature. The secularization of sexual ethics does not

take the existence of sin into consideration. In the Bible, sin is understood as missing the mark or falling short of God's glory. Sin is not only found in sinful acts but also pervades humanity because of our sinful nature which we inherited from Adam through original sin.

The outworking of sin is seen in practices that are antithetical to God's Law, which is normative for human life and behavior, as has been argued. Whereas emotive appeals are made concerning how we should understand homosexuality, the biblical witness categorizes homosexuality as a sin. Romans 1:18–32 argues that homosexual desires and acts are not natural but rather describes them as “dishonorable passions” (v. 26 ESV) and “shameful acts” (v. 27 ESV). The presupposition of this passage is that if people move away from God's truth they end up in ethical confusion regarding sexuality. In this passage, homosexual acts are said to attract “the due penalty for their error” (v. 27 ESV).

Pro-homosexual ethicists would read texts such as Romans 1:18–32 and 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 as speaking of homosexual practice in the Greco-Roman context of pederasty or rape. Such critiques argue that consensual sexual relationships between two people of the same gender should be viewed as a normal romantic relationship. In fact, Gnuse (2015, 85), argues that refuting homosexual practice using the Bible is similar to how the Bible was used to justify slavery. Two quick responses could be offered. First, these biblical texts prohibit not only consensual homosexual expression but also sexual expression outside the bounds of the marital covenant. Secondly, conflating slavery with homosexuality is a false equivalence because homosexuality is a moral issue while racism is an ethnic issue.

The apostle Peter also interprets homosexual acts in the time of Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah as abhorrent. It attracted God's judgment because “the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the

unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority” (2 Pet 2:9–10a ESV). Paul lumps homosexuality together with the sins of fornication (heterosexual sin before marriage) and adultery (sexual activity with someone other than one’s spouse) (1 Cor 6:9–11). Those who continue in these lifestyles “will [not] inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:10 ESV). The issue therefore is not that the Bible is committing violence against homosexuals, but rather that the Bible proscribes ethical norms for both homosexuals and heterosexuals. The books of the New Testament have a unanimous voice on this issue.

However, while the teaching of sin is one that humbles or even reveals the nakedness of humanity, the message of the gospel provides clothing that dignifies all who are in the trenches of sexual sin. Paul continues to say “And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11 ESV). For Paul, there is hope for homosexual and heterosexual sin. The New Testament scholar Leon Morris (1990, 94) offers the following exegetical insight on this verse.

The prefix *apo* points to the complete washing ‘away’ of sins. The tense is past, the aorist referring to one decisive action. You were sanctified is in the same tense and will here indicate God’s act in setting them apart to be his. You were justified is another aorist; it looks back to the time when they were accepted as just before God. It is a legal term used of acquittal, ‘reckon as righteous’, ‘declare righteous’, ‘acquit’. Paul uses it here as an act of God, whereby on the basis of Christ’s atoning death, he declares believers to be just, and accepts them as his own.

Herein lies the hope of the gospel as the power for transformation. Contrary to the claim of CSE, genuine transformation will not come from neutral ethical foundations but rather from ethical foundations that align with God’s design and an accompanying spiritual power to live in line with those foundations.

## 4. Practical Theological Reflections

### 4.1 *The role of public theology in sexuality education*

Public Theology is a discipline that engages with various public spheres including the church, society, and the academy. It is therefore necessary for Public Theology to engage in sexual ethics as it seeks to explore the common good of society (Smit 2007, 25). This research reveals the significance of Public Theology as a mediating conversation partner between diverse disciplines, in this case, public policy and Biblical Theology. Theology that is grounded in the authority of the Scriptures must also be grounded in its application in every sphere of life. In an age where sexuality takes center stage in public life, Christians often feel inadequate and sometimes scared of engaging with public issues. The nature of sexuality, this study reveals, is not only a public issue but also a sensitive issue. This is so because of its cultural, political, and spiritual nature. Yet, Christians must not be mute on it, but must thoughtfully, graciously, compassionately, and boldly speak to such an issue, because the Scriptures have a lot to say, as this study has shown, when it comes to sexuality. They comment on its nature as a created reality, its significance for human and married life, its place in the family, and its role as a means of safeguarding future generations who belong to God’s covenant people.

Such an approach that seeks to impress ethical values from God's wisdom must do so intergenerationally but also through discipleship relationships (Chiroma 2020, 360).

## 4.2 *Pastoral care approaches in youth and family ministries*

The writing of this article coincided with two relevant occurrences: The first is the Church of England voting for the blessing of same-sex couples and the second is the Supreme Court ruling in Kenya allowing for the legal incorporation of an LGBTQIA+ organization. These two issues have generated significant debate within my Kenyan context. I teach in an ecumenical institution, that has a significant Anglican demographic. The Anglican Church of Kenya gave a statement in the week of February 13, 2023, denouncing the verdict from the “mother” church (Muia 2023). Shortly afterward, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa followed closely with a similarly worded statement against the blessing of homosexual couples (KIRK TV 2023). It is a sign of the lines that are drawn when it comes to the contentious issues of sexuality, even while these two churches remain pastorally open to walk alongside those who identify differently.

On the second issue, it draws attention to the often-thin line between church and state. While the state has the authority to pass laws that touch on its citizens, the church has a role in keeping the state accountable. Many have also argued whether or not Kenya is a Christian or a secular state. If we define it as the former, then the church's response to the matter is understandable. In fact, many church denominations have offered press statements, calling for the state to repeal its ruling. If we define Kenya as a secular state, then how do Christians navigate the gender and sexuality

discussion within a space in which all views must be acknowledged? In this section, I hope to move beyond the ethical standing, which I have argued for, to the practical implications this has on pastoral care within our youth and family ministry contexts.

This study notes the integrative nature of sexuality as Balswick and Balswick (2008, 29) have observed that it is informed by divine mandate and shaped by sociocultural, genetic, and biological factors. However, it now explores the role of pastoral caregivers, both ordained ministers and lay ministers, in sexual ethical teaching within the ecclesial and family context. The topic of sexuality is a sensitive issue. While churches in the Global South may hold conservative views—which is good—the way they approach the discussion and practice in dealing with sexual diversities is often harsh. A pastoral care approach is therefore significant because it moves beyond our knowledge of facts to how we apply wisdom in real-life situations (Patton 2005, 7).

Rather than relegating the duty of sexuality education to the state, the church must recover its role in sexual education. This is especially the case because the church has the wisdom of God as its guide. This is not to say that there is no wisdom outside the church. If, as we hold, sex is given as a gift from God for the well-being of society, we must move beyond viewing sex as a taboo topic and address it with pastoral sensitivity, wisdom, beauty, and truth. While sex and sexuality education has been viewed negatively within the church, we must recover the sexual ethics in the Bible and teach them to the next generations. The negativity of sex and sexual education in the church is correlated with the influence of stoicism in the Greco-Roman context of the early church. In stoicism, human beings muffle their emotional life so as to control their bodies. Dominian (2001, 1–6) looks at how the Early Church Fathers exhibited a negative attitude towards sex. For instance, Tertullian proclaimed that “continence brings down the gift of

the spirit,” Origen viewed sex as a temporal activity and went to the extent of castrating himself, and Chrysostom viewed marriage as a mere necessity of the fall (Dominian 2001, 5). These views have cast a long shadow on the way we approach pastoral care and sexual education among young people.

## 5. Conclusion

This research proposes the need to ground sexual ethics within a biblical framework. Capitulating to the popular view on sexuality, even to please the next generation, is wooing them to the world. While Canales (2022, 82) proposes pastoral care approaches to LGBTQIA+ persons based on the *imago Dei*, his argument that conservative sexual ethics is retrogressive as an “older paradigm for myopic interpretations” and “needs to catch up with the science” may be an example of the former argument of surrendering to popular culture. Perhaps a more grounded pastoral care approach would be to respect the human dignity of all persons, even those whose biological desires do not align with God’s intended design, while honoring the sacredness of human sexuality, and how it should be expressed, as Bongmba (2007, 50) argues in his study on the Church and HIV/AIDS. This supports the larger argument of this study, that sexuality education and approaches to pastoral care in a complex world must be grounded within biblical ethics. Such biblical ethics takes the whole Scripture as God’s word and carefully pays attention to the systematic exploration of sexuality rather than reading culture into Scripture.

Secondly, pastoral care for those who struggle with sexual sin needs to be sensitive. Sexual sin encompasses not only same-sex attraction and intercourse, but also adultery, pornography, and masturbation. Pastoral care portends a gracious approach that seeks to heal and redeem human persons who are in sin or who are facing struggles with their sexuality. Sensitivity is needed because, while we offer grace to people facing other

types of struggles in the Christian life, we are not as gracious to those struggling with sexual sin. In some cases, sexual sin is erroneously treated as the unpardonable sin. The sexual ethics in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is a helpful basis for those pastoring young people in a sexual age. He proclaimed that the gospel is powerful enough to transform all people caught up in sexual sin and struggle (1 Cor 6:9–11).

Lastly, sexual education should form part of youth and family ministries. Church leaders working with families and young people within an African context must note the liberal tendencies that seek to unhinge sexuality from its ethical perspective. They should also be conversant with the emerging sexualities and unpack a holistic biblical theology of sexuality, noting its nature as a gift, its idolization, its purpose, as well as its significance as a pointer to the ultimate communion we have with God. This can be applied within pastoral ministry settings such as pre-marital counseling, teaching and preaching ministries, as well as in one-on-one counseling sessions.

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