

Challenges and Implications of Genesis 2:18 – 24 on Same-Sex Marriage for the Contemporary Society E.F. Uzoma & M.K. Okoye

Abstract

The paper examined biblical marriage from the perspective of Genesis 2:18. The text established the divine institution and order for marriage which is simply expressed in a man and woman union. Other implications of this sacred union were glaringly elucidated through the hermeneutical study and literary analysis of some key words in the text. The study also reflected on some threats to the marriage institution but with particular emphasis on some same-sex challenge. It was identified in the paper that same-sex debate constitutes a major force that marriage contends with in contemporary society. While considering the various arguments supporting Same-sex, the paper emphasized that the practice of homosexuality is detrimental to marriage and the society in terms of procreation, morality, family life and natural sexual fulfillment. It is an affair which challenges God's authority and integrity and consequently invites divine judgment.

Introduction

Genesis 2: 18 - 24 presents marriage as a divinely instituted union, involving a man and woman. As such, marriage is a sacred covenantal union of one man and one woman, formed when the two swear before God an oath of lifelong loyalty and love to one another. It is a means through which the society perpetuates itself culturally. Marriage therefore presupposes family. In the traditional society, before the inception of civilization, marriage institution was held in sacred esteem. Over time, this divinely ordained union began to lose its sanctity and in fact became secularized in most societies. All forms of marriages began to spring up and are actually accepted in the society. Marriage is now wrongly understood merely as a union that is consummated in Church without the consciousness of divine involvement in the actual relationship. Contemporary experience also reveals that many young people of the opposite sex live together as husband and wife without being joined officially either by traditional, court or religious institution.

Secularization of marriage has changed God's intention of marriage and turned it into a social affair. Campos who evaluated the effect of secularization on marriage came up with the view that marriage is no longer taken seriously. Further threats to marriage can be traced to the influence of electronic media, modern technologies and new teachings. Women enlightenment contributed a larger quota to the problems facing marriages in recent times.

One other major threat to marriage is the introduction and legalization of same - sex marriage in some societies. Although it has not been legalized in Nigeria, it is a big force to contend with. Same-sex marriage or gay marriage is an official term deployed for the legally and socially recognized bond or arrangement between people of the same-sex living as husband and wife. Same-sex marriage is akin to homosexual marriage. Within the context of homosexual marriage, one of the males acts as a queen and the other the man. This sexual expression which started as pleasure has in recent times been commercialized and turned into a lucrative business. Unlike the female counterparts, the male undergraduates, it was gathered make more money and get more patronage because the number of men involved in the business is still low. In fact, Ojeme, Obasola and Adelaku (2008) introduced this practice as a new business among male campus students. Investigations reveal that the young men make an average of ₦50, 000 from one outing and may get more money when they travel out of their base to meet their partners who usually belong to the affluent group in the society. More money still can be made in the business depending on who acts as “top” or “bottom” in the relationship. The gay movement prefers their marriage to be addressed as equal marriage stressing that they seek equality.

Logically speaking, same-sex marriage is not Christian marriage because it negated the biblical meaning and purpose of marriage. In the Bible, marriage is divinely ordered and designed to form a permanent union between one man and one woman for the purpose of procreation and propagation of the human race. Protagonists of homosexual marriage argue that marriage is not exclusively a heterosexual union and defining it as such infringes on individual’s fundamental rights to privacy, free associations and expression. In marriage, an individual should be allowed to express his choice of a life partner. They therefore insist that marriage should be based on moral commitment to equality and the belief that human sexual orientation is a gift from God whether homosexual or heterosexual.

This problem of the placement of same-sex has sparked off a debate both within Christendom and the secular world. The contemporary debate on the legalization and acceptance of homosexual marriage is of serious concern to the society. This paper therefore would examine these arguments critically in the light of the biblical principle and purpose of marriage in Genesis 2: 18ff. The paper would historically and hermeneutically examine the implications of same-sex practice on family, and on the moral and social aspects of the society.

Genesis 2: 18 – 24: A Hermeneutical Study

The book of Genesis is the first of the first five books of the Pentateuch. The book is acknowledged by scholars to be in some kind of literary connection with the succeeding books of the Pentateuch – Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The title Genesis is named after the first word namely *b'reshit* “in the beginning”. The book Genesis, therefore known as the book of beginnings introduces the beginning of the world, of mankind and all things, including marriage. God was the one who created all things – hence from the beginning *b'reshit bara' elohim* in the beginning God created... (Gen.1). God created man in his own image (Gen 1: 26) to rule over the rest of creation.

God observed “it is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a helper suitable for him”. The man *ha'adam* was truly alone Hebrew *l'badh*, even though he had all the animals around him. Not even the higher beings- the angels could solve the problem of loneliness that man had. What the man needed was not just a companion but a matching, compatible and complementary sex woman *'ishshâ*. Adam needed someone to complement his happiness within the sphere in which he was destined to live (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown 2004). God declared, I will make a help meet for him. Help meet Hebrew *K'negdô* literally means corresponding to, his counterpart, one like himself in form and constitution, disposition and affections. This help meet was to be altogether suitable to his nature and wants. This helper was needed so that man might fulfill his calling, not only to perpetuate and multiply his race, but to cultivate and govern the earth (Keil and Delitzch 2004). By declaring that man should not be alone, God was opposed to the practice of celibacy and the suitable help meet, the woman is opposed to the same sex union. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fail, one will lift up his companion. But woe to Him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? (Eccl.4:9-11).

When eventually God created the woman by taking her out of the man's ribs, he brought her to the man by himself. Adam's joyful shout at the sight of the woman is worthy of note. He exclaimed, ‘this is it, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman *'ishshâ*. Therefore comes the verdict ‘For this cause shall a man *'îsh* the male sex leave his father and his mother and shall cleave *dabaq* to clinge or adhere, abide fast)

fast together and be joined (together) (Strong, 1990) to his '*ishshâ* – woman and they both shall become one flesh (Matt. 19: 5&6).

Marriage is a re-uniting of two constituent parts – male and female – of a man. What was one flesh in man, in marriage comes together again, and once more become one flesh in husband and wife and together they form an inseparable partnership. One ‘fleshness’ is related to sexual union, sexual union is reserved to marriage, between a man and a woman. This union excludes adultery, fornication, and homosexuality. Adultery and fornication were ruled out as violations of the creator’s holiness. The sexuality aspect of marriage is a divinely endowed ability for procreation. Only a man and woman together have the natural biological capacity to produce children. This power of procreation of life in order to bring God’s spirit children into the world is sacred and precious (Newsroom 2008).

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

Marriage was instituted by God from the foundation of the world to be a sacred union. Marriage was not meant for same -sex, lesbians but for male and female folks. Attesting to this heterosexual nature of marriage, Jesus declared “have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female. It is for this reason that a man should leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they both become one flesh, Matthew19: 4ff. A man cleaves, glues to (Pfeiffer, 1962) a woman, not a man to his fellow man. The sacred nature of marriage is closely linked to the power of procreation. The misuse of this power undermines the institution of family and therefore weakens reproduction.

Same sex marriage debate in the Anglican Church

Same- sex is an adjective of, for, relating to people of the same sex specifically homosexuals (2010). Same sex/ homosexuality is romantic sexual attraction or behaviour among members of the same sex. Same -sex marriage is a marriage contract that is restricted to members of the same-sex -gay men and lesbians. It is also described as gay marriage but the gay positive groups prefer to be addressed as marriage equality. Their agitations have been that: (a) the treatment given to them is unjust and unfair in a democratic set up. (b) they are not accorded dignity and respect. (c) they are denied human right and freedom of choice of marriage partners. (d) they should be allowed to naturally express their sexual needs (e) they are also demanding for financial protection and as such would want the civil partnership union to be given full religious rights.

Though there is long history of homosexual practices, the idea of same sex marriage was rare, widely unacceptable, and unknown until the mid-nineties. This was followed by the continued campaign for homosexual marriage, and civil union. These agitations have brought about a paradigm shift in the societal understanding and attitudes towards homosexual relationships.

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

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

Implications of Genesis 2: 18ff on contemporary society.

Genesis 2: 18 has hermeneutically exposed the sacred nature of marriage. Marriage was made, created and formed, Hebrew *bara*, by God, from the beginning of creation. It is God who has the prerogative to decide how marriage should be contracted. Hence Jesus re-iterated, “he who made them from the beginning made them male and female”(Matt.19:4). It was not Adam who demanded for a companion but God who conceived the idea knowing that Adam was lonely. Man lacked a compatible companion and this God found in a woman and therefore presented her to the man as his spouse. Marriage is not an exclusively human/ secular institution. The divine involvement in marriage made clear from the text shows that marriage should not be socialized and legalized as a state affair. The state should therefore acknowledge this holy institution as a divinely ordained pre-political institution. Also, marriage relationship shall not be politicized in any form or by any nomenclature. The values, virtue, vision and patterns of the institution should be shaped by creation order and what it was meant to be as it was handed down to the society and not on human constitution and reasoning (Gen. 2: 24, Mark 10: 6f, Matt. 19: 4f, Eph 5: 13).

Implication on reproduction and the family.

One important aspect of creation is the charge given to man to be fruitful and replenish the earth. Man needs to tend the earth, maintain it and ensure its continuity. Man can achieve this through a heterosexual union and not through the same –sex union. Reproduction is therefore a very fundamental aspect of marriage for the continuity of the human race. The implication of creating the woman for the man was an avenue of sustenance of the earth. It is not good for the man to be alone without the ability to procreate. When God brought the man and the woman together, the family emerged.

The family unit is a very strategic structure in the society. Societal life is shaped through the family unit. The family provides the avenue for proper nurturing of children and consequently the entire society. God in his infinite wisdom knew that the society can only be ideally impacted by the family. By trusting the family in the hands of the man and woman, God intended that through the complementary efforts of the two, the children will be given proper direction. Socialization of the institution of marriage will eventually destabilize the home and alter God’s plan for the family. It creates confusion of gender role and identity for the younger generation. It denies a child right or access to a love of a father or mother. And, a child needs the

love of both parents. The presence of both parents seems to be necessary for proper emotional and mental development of a child.

Same sex marriage negates divine order of procreation through sexual relationship of man and woman. Recent trends in the same sex saga show that gay couples now make moves to adopt children. Labour laws are supporting that gay couples can adopt children. Arguments raised by gay couples are that children are not necessarily hindered psychologically and may not end up as gays. They have also disputed the role of the environment in child nurturing. (Ramon Johnson). Whatever may be their philosophy, this paper maintains that since the gay position is non-scripturally based, the issue of gay child adoption is a distortion of the divine order for family. Same-sex marriage is incompatible with the creation of male and female as distinct and yet complementary sexual beings. After instituting marriage, God gave the man and woman the authority to pro-create in order to multiply and fill the earth. Sex between two men or two women cannot produce children. The order of having a family only to adopt children as family members is an aberration and distortion of the original order placed by God. Advocates of gay marriage argue that children brought up by gays have better psychological disposition than those of heterosexual parents (2004).

Implications on morality.

The sanctity of marriage made which was made obvious from Genesis 2:18:24 presupposes morality in the home and the society. A modification of marriage to include same-sex union will deprive marriage of its biblical meaning. Same-sex marriage will result in the neglect of moral principles. In fact, same-sex marriage anchors on immorality. The Bible instructs that any form of marriage that opposes the divine principle of one man, one woman is a distortion of divine order. As Stamps (2010, 10) puts it, the marriage which God formed excludes adultery, polygamy, homosexuality, immoral living and unscriptural divorce. Legalization of same-sex marriage will slowly destroy the sanctity of marriage.

Lessons for the Anglican Communion of Nigeria.

The position of the conservative Church of England on the issue of same-sex argument is a commendable one. Though in Nigeria such threats are not obvious, the Church must draw lessons from their counterpart in England. However, the more profound instruction and basis for resistance on this

absurd marital affair must be anchored on the scriptures. The Church should be mindful of the following facts:

- The Bible must remain the reference book in all matters of doctrine, beliefs and practices.
- On no account should the Church surrender to threats either from state or from the Church.
- Seasons and times change but God's word is unchangeable.
- In the same Genesis, God visited the Sodomy homosexuals with the judgment of fire (Gen. 19) and the Bible promises same visitation to all sexual perverts (Rom. 1:18ff).

Conclusion:

The debate on same sex marriage is an unending one posing legal, ethical and moral challenges to both the society and religious institutions. The church has not been able to handle this issue. It has become an object of threat to the unity of the body of Christ especially in the Anglican Communion. The development in the secular society in its acceptance of homosexual life style has put pressure on the Church to yield to its secular counterpart. While some denominations like Episcopal Church of United States of America has accepted the idea of same- sex marriage, others like the Anglican Church of England and the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, continue to face the ever growing political and socio-ecclesial pressure to give in. The Church has no consensual view on the moral basis of same- sex marriage. Advocates of both sides have continued to air their views on the knotty matter.

No ethical issue has in recent times generated much debate in the church and the society like the issue of the acceptance of same-sex marriage. Although societal attitude towards it varies from culture to culture, the idea of committed monogamous same-sex marriage is incompatible with the scripture. From Genesis 1 onwards, the Bible repeatedly affirms that God created man and woman for a lifelong marriage relationship. The difference in their genders constitutes the foundation for sexual union and establishes men's procreative possibilities. Marriage as a heterosexual covenant relationship is the initiative of God right from the beginning.

Homosexual marriage is a violation of divine order and design. The divine order for marriage is man is to woman and not man is to man as some argue .God's standard for marriage overrides cultural and societal

legislations. Sexual expression between a man and woman is natural and fulfilling. God, the initiator of marriage provided principles that should guide marriage relationships. In same-sex sexual relationship, it is like trying to attach a screw to a screw or a nut to a nut. This is a violation of design and purpose. A screw is meant for a nut. In short, it is an assault on the integrity of God, the creator, and his intention of creating human beings into two distinct and complementary genders.

Any change or threat to change to the culture is distressing to many people. But a change to the structure of the fundamental building block of society the family can be particularly upsetting (Robinson 2010).

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