

A CRITIQUE OF THE PHENOMENON OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE USING ST. AUGUSTINE'S THEORY OF DIVINE ILLUMINATION

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ABSTRACT

One phenomenon that has generated much debate in our contemporary society is same-sex marriage. This is a situation whereby people of the same sex agree to marry and live together as husband and wife. The supporters of this practice base their reason on love which according to them transcends gender. While the opposers criminalize it as being against natural law, divine law etc. The question is: why do people engage in same-sex marriage? Is such practice not against the natural law or the traditional understanding of marriage as heterosexual? What are the moral implications for our contemporary society? Using St. Augustine's theory of divine illumination, the paper critically examines the above problems and attributes it to wrong judgment by the mind due to lack of divine illumination. St. Augustine in his theory of divine illumination averred that the human mind without being illumined by God cannot make the right judgment. The paper therefore calls for a complete abolition of same-sex marriage as it is morally unacceptable, inhuman, indecent and against natural and divine law. The researcher employed the philosophical methods of exposition and critical analysis to conduct the research.

Keywords: Same-sex marriage, Divine illumination, Gay, homosexual, morality.

INTRODUCTION

Same-sex marriage is a global dilemma in our contemporary society. As the name implies, it means a union of same gender (male to male and female to female) in marriage. According to Ogungbemi the supporters of same-sex marriage believe that marriage "ought to be based on love, rights and choice of the individuals whether it is between a man and a woman or between the same sex"(10). This in essence means that provided love is fulfilled, right and choice is respected and marriage is fulfilled. Goodman in his view stated thus:

...by Gay love we do not necessarily mean genital sex; we mean loving with intelligence and playfulness, with physical caring, with sensual delight and with tenderness and strength. In getting in truth with abundant love inside ourselves, orgasm is not the issue, caring is what matters. Gayness enhances sexual liberation and helps close the gap between sensuality and sexuality (48).

It therefore becomes a global challenge since the traditional conception of marriage is heterosexual. Akpan looked at it as "a phenomenon that has engendered moral, religious and legal debates all over the world" (2). The challenge is that this phenomenon has been legalized and accepted in many nations of the world. In some places, it is legalized and legitimized but not generally accepted; in another, there are moves for its acceptability but not yet legalized by the state. The struggle for approval and disapproval continues globally. There ensued a hot debate of its "moral status and justification" (Akpan 2).

Meanwhile, the practice of same-sex marriage is not a recent thing. Its history spreads across historical line from the early Roman Empire across the sub-saharan Africa, but it does not gain global acceptability mostly in African Nations and other countries of the world. The reason being that the understanding of marriage *Ab initio* was heterosexual.

The paper seeks to critically examine the practice of same-sex marriage in the light of St. Augustine's theory of divine illumination. Base on this theory same-sex marriage is seen as the inability of the human mind to make the right judgment and also grasp eternal truth due to the absent of divine illumination. Truth is "what is real, what is certain,...remain the way it is notwithstanding the circumstances and person involved" (Asira and Udofia, 124). The truth about marriage as earlier mentioned is that it was meant to be heterosexual. It is in this light that the paper condemns same-sex marriage (for whatever reason) as morally unacceptable as it is not only against natural cum divine law, but also a product of wrong judgment occasioned by lack of divine illumination.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ORIENTATION

Traditionally, marriage according to Tischler "is the socially recognized, legitimized and supported union of individuals of opposite sex" (296). With this understanding, it means that same-sex marriage is a variance form of marriage orientation. The advocates and respondents of same-sex marriage according to Marmon observed that; "marriage ...is more than just a relationship between a male and a female; it is about a love that can transcend all boundaries. Love does not know gender nor does it see race, or ethnicity" (34). Its historical record revealed that, the practice is not of recent. It spans through ages and spread across various continents of the world. This was not devoid of series of responses ranging from approval, non-approval, criminalization and de-approval which is based on factors such as cultural diversities, government policies, religious alignments,

etc. There are often spark of emotional and political clashes between the respondents and opposers.

Nevertheless, its historicity is traced to the ancient period. Boswell opined that “the first performance of same-sex marriage between child emperor Elagabus to Hierocles, his chariot driver, as the husband, He is also said to have married Zoticus an athlete in a Lawish public ceremony in Rome” (3). Equally, history has it that Emperor Nero got married to “Pythagoras, with whom was the bride. He later married Sporus, a young boy and here took the role of a groom” (Akpan, 3). Notably, in Greece, there is conspicuous defense of male love in Greek literature. Crompton wrote;

There is ample evidence, however, that by the beginning of the classical era (480BCE) his achaic heroes Achilles and Parroodus had become exemplars of male love. Greek lyrics poet sing of male love from almost the earlier fragments down to the end of classical true (1).

He added;

...for a man not to have had a male lover seems to have bespoken a lack of character or a deficiency in sensibility. It is this enthusiastic note, marked by a kind of spiritual elan, that clearly and strongly in what is probably the most notable defense of male lovers in Greek literature... for I know not any greater blessings to a young man who is beginning life than a virtuous lover, or to a love than a beloved youth, for the principle that ought to be the guide of men who would nobly live than principle (3).

Crompton went on to remark that in 385BC when Plato wrote *The symposium*, that there was an established evidence that Achilles and Parroclius were not just compatriot in the battle field but “a lover in the full physical sense” (4). This physical love was sexual and “The later writing of Aeschylus as clearly regarded their relation as sexual” (4).

The medieval era where her “thinkers... cut across major religion of the world ranging from Christianity, Judaism and Islam” (Umotong, 11), “grew less tolerant of homosexual unions than either the Republic or the earlier Empire had been ... (Eskidge 1447). Being influenced by Religiosity, Udoh averred that “...Theologians have seen the need for a Bible based theology that can proffer solution to the problem of the environment” (135). Much later, “the church was in some respect tolerant of same-sex unions in practice,... especially within its own clergy” (Eskidge 1450). Akpan reported of same-sex marriage between “Parodias and Mumbo, Vandilas in the Galician municipality of Rairiz de Veig. This union occurred April 16, 1061 and was conducted by a priest in a small chapel” (3). Consequently, in 1989 Boswell claimed;

Gay clerics apparently took part in homosexual marriage ceremonies, which were widely known in the Catholic world from the fifth century on. Such ceremonies were performed in Catholic churches by Priests and they established what the

community regarded as marriage, or commemorated special friendships, in both cases in devoutly Christian terms (3, 11).

This claim was based on his research in medieval Christian historical collection.

The contemporary period witnessed the move of the LGBT for the legitimization and legalization of their right. Again, Akpan noted that, "the contemporary period witnessed a heightening of gay rights activism in the 1970's especially in the western world" (3). Their struggle was that marriage "ought to be based on love, rights, and choice of the individuals whether it is between a man and woman or between the same-sex" (Ogungbemi 10). The struggle and search of legal recognition took root between the 1980's and 1990's.

Below is the chronicle of legalization of same-sex marriage globally. Rozzelle, Navarre , Trimble listed thus: Netherland - 2001, Begum - 2003, Canada - 2005, Spain - 2005, Smith Africa - 2006, Norway - 2009, Sweden - 2009, Iceland - 2010, Portugal - 2010, Argentina - 2010, Denmark - 2012, Uruguay - 2013, New Zealand - 2013, France - 2013, Brazil - 2013, England and Wales - 2014, Scotland - 2014, Luxembourg - 2015, Ireland - 2015, United States - 2015, Greenland - 2016, Columbia - 2017, Germany - 2017, Malta - 2017, Malta - 2017, Australia - 2017, Austria - 2017, Taiwan - 2017, Ecuador - 2019, Northern Ireland - 2020, Costa Rica - 2020, Switzerland - 2020, Switzerland - 2022, Cuba - 2022, Andorra - 2023.

In recent times Attitudes toward same-sex marriage has changed dramatically. The western world has become more supportive to the same-sex marriage orientation. According to Emmanuel and Austin, " public opinion polls demonstrates that support for same-sex marriage has received an astronomical increase across all different strata and groups over the last decade" (1353). Instance of legal legitimating of same-sex marriage is the United States Supreme Court who ruled that same-sex couples have a right to marry anywhere in the United States.

It is worthy of note that Same-sex marriage orientation is not alarming in Africa compared to America and Europe. There is variance of same-sex union in Africa. These include: Man-Boy relationships and female-husbands or woman marriage. Evans - Pritchard, one of the leading anthropologists documented the institution of "boy-wives" for military men among the Azande which is today the nation of Sudan. Pritchard opined;

I have pointedly used the term "wife" and "marriage" for, as the texts will make clear, the relationship was, for so long as it lasted, a legal union on the model of a normal marriage. The warrior paid bride wealth (some five years or more) to the parents of his boy and performed services for them as he would have done had he married their daughter. Also, if another man had relation with his boy he could, I was told, sue him at court for adultery. ...with regards to the sexual side, at night, the boy slept with his lover, who had intercourse with him between his thighs..." (1429-30).

Another variety is the female husband which is “A marriage contracted between women normally involving an older one (a widow or one who is still married to a man) and younger one, but sometimes two, three or more women are involved” (2). It is either a widow marries a younger woman to have children for her late husband, or the existing wife married to have children for the husband because of her barrenness or not bearing a male child. Kyerland opined “Barrenness was the reason why Otiego’s wife (or the wife of the wife’s wife) gave birth to a boy the inheritance of the house was secured” (20). Evans – Protchard has this to say about it.

What seems to us, but not at all to Nuer, a somewhat strange union in which a woman marries another woman and counts as the Pater (father) of the children born of the wife. Such marriages are by no means uncommon in Nuerland, and they must be regarded as a form of simple legal marriage, for the woman-husband marries her wife in exactly the same way as a man marries a woman... we may perhaps refer to this kind of union as woman-marriage. A woman who marries in this way is generally barren, and for this reason counts in some respects as a man... If she is rich she may marry several wives. She is either legal husband and can demand damage. If they have relations with men without her consent, she is the Pater (father) of their children, and on the marriage of their daughters she receives “the cattle of the father” and her brothers and sisters receive the other cattle which go to the father’s side in the distribution of bridewealth. Her children are called after her, as though she was a man, and I was told that they address her as ‘father’ (108-109).

This practice is found in other traditional African societies.

The foregoing entails the practice of same-sex marriage both in African and non African countries. In the West the practice is said to be motivated by pleasure and companionship, while in Africa, it is the product of sustenance and the maintaining of family lineage. Africa is a communitarian society. Communitarianism is “the doctrine that the group (that is, the society) constitutes the focus of the activity of the individual members of the society” (Obioha 5). This implies that community life is the basis of the African society. To achieve this, it becomes pertinent that everyone born into any family must also have children that build the family in his/her name.

ST. AUGUSTINE THEORY OF DIVINE ILLUMINATION

To have a succinct description of the Augustinian theory of divine illumination, it is pertinent to look at his historical background briefly. Umotong summarizes it thus:

Augustine was an African Priest born at Thagaste in North African province of Numidia during the barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire. Augustine’s mother, Monica was a

Christian, but his father was a pagan. Augustine began the study of rhetoric's at the age of sixteen in cartage. Cartage was a port city notorious for its licentious ways of living... He also taught in Carthage before moving to Rome and subsequently settled at Milan where he became municipal professor of rhetorics in 334AD. During his early life in Carthage he lived in moral debauchery (17-18)

On his life of debauchery, Stumpf opined that "this deep moral turmoil ...drove him to a life -long quest for true wisdom and spiritual peace (133). This drive for wisdom and spiritual peace led him to a Romance with Manichaeism which is "a religious doctrine that holds the view that human life is a struggle between good and evil, God and matter" (Umotong 18). The fact is that man's "existence is an activity. It involves a lot of struggle" (Denis 82). The struggle is because "Human life is characterized by lots of difficulties... from choicessness in circumstance of birth they grow to change or make the best of their personal lives and societies (220-221). This did not guarantee his aspiration. He eventually went to Rome where he made and was befriended by St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. According to Lawhead, "he (Augustine) began to read the Neoplatonists, including Plotinus, in earnest. Their teaching inspired him to turn inward and to seek after spiritual reality" (123). At a point when he heard of the conversion of "the great teacher victorinus, a renowned translator of the Neoplatonists and Aristotle's logic... Augustine was amazed" (Lawhead 123). This was the turning point in his life. He wandered into a garden and suddenly heard a voice that said to him "let it be now." He was choked with tears after he read from Roman 13:13 - a passage that speaks directly to the sin that Augustine cannot seem to escape from. That was when his heart was filled with peace and he yielded his life to God. He was made a Bishop of Hippo in 396AD. He died in 430Ad. Prominent among his works were his *confession* and *the city of God*.

The theory of divine illumination has an ancient background. It is contained in the works of Plato, Aristotle and other pre-medieval thinkers. Accordingly, Reichard in his book: *The Divine Illumination. Interiorized Truth* stated that "Plato himself is undoubtedly the father of the philosophical tradition to which the analogy of light is fundamental" (NP). Plato in *The republic* spoke about flashes of light which brought about understanding and insight. Their theory was equally upheld in post-Aristotelian time by Alexander Aphrodisiac, Avicenna, Averroë and St. Thomas Aquinas. Also, the pre-contemporary Platonists like Albinus, Plotinus, etc. These thinkers greatly influenced his (Augustine) writing on divine illumination theory.

What informed Augustine idea of divine illumination was the notion of the skeptics and the sophists who held that "only probably can be known and that nothing can be known by the human mind respectively" (Maduka 234). So he moved to ascertained that the mind can arrive at the truth. In his account of human knowledge, he

described both the object of perception and the human organs as being mutable, finite and not eternal. Stumpf wrote;

In his account of human knowledge, all the elements involved are mutable or imperfect, hence, finite and not eternal. The sense objects are mutable, and the bodily organs of sense and also subject to change. The mind itself is a creature and therefore finite and not perfect (139).

The question now is how the human mind which is mutable, fallible and finite can attain certainty and “discover eternal truth about which the mind has no doubts, truth that indeed confront mind with the coercion power of certitude, truth so superior to what the human mind could produce that the mind must adjust or conform to them?” (Stumpf 139). In order to overcome these limitations, Philosophers had postulated various ideas. Plato was of the view that “knowledge is recollection, whereby the soul is made to remember what it once knew before it entered the body. “...Aristotle argued that the eternal universal ideas were abstracted by the intellect from particular things” (Stumpf 139). For Augustine as quoted by Stumpf;

Humans are made in such a way that when the eyes of one's body see an object, the mind can form an image of it provided the object is bathe in light. Similarly, the mind is capable of “seeing” eternal objects provided that they too are bathe in their own appropriate light (140).

This therefore means that for St. Augustine, the ability to make right judgments can be made possible, when the sense and the mind are illuminated by God. Oyelakin opined that “The divine power of illumination is identified with light which empowers the mind to apprehend the necessity and immutability in a certain judgment... also enables the mind to make judgment about things in their relation to the eternal ideas or standard” (68). This showed that the human mind cannot grasp the certainty of truth without being divinely illuminated. This made Aspell to say “...no creature however rational and intellectual, is lighted of itself, but is lighted by participation of eternal truth” (16). Stumpf affirmed that “there is present in (us)... the light of eternal reason in which light the immutable truths are seen” (140). Therefore, “the divine light is to the mind what the sun is to the eye” (Lawhead 127). The divine light illuminates objects for clearer visibility which was already there in experience; it also illuminates ideas to grasp the eternal truth and to make the right judgment. This means that in the absent of the divine light the human mind is capable of making wrong judgment contrary to natural and divine law. The divine light which illuminates, functions in the human mind to provide it with rules for judgment. Augustine in his confession asserts “Thou didst gleam and shine, and chase away my blindness (212).

Throughout his life, as a philosopher and a theologian, “Augustine speaks of this illumination in a number of different ways viz as the mind participation in the word of God, as God's interior

presence to the mind, as Christ dwelling in the human soul and teaching the mind from within, and so forth" (Maduka 88).

THE PHENOMENON OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN THE FACE OF AUGUSTINE'S THEORY OF DIVINE ILLUMINATION.

Having carefully examined same-sex marriage orientation and St. Augustine's theory of divine illumination, this paper seeks to appraise the former from the lens of the later which is based on the word of God as the divine light.

As earlier mentioned in this study, the respondent of same-sex union claimed as reasons for their action "freedom of choice and human right. Man as observed by Udoeka and Udozia "... is a rational being who is endowed with the ability to make choices. Human choice is the foundation of morality, because one has to either choose to do good or bad" (176). It is on the basis of this that according to Udo "... man is held responsible for his actions or inactions" (54). Choice or human right is not a justifiable reason, but "it is more or less like a toga; a weapon used by the westerner to justify and to globalize what ordinarily is immoral" (Akpan 7). Beside, the physical setting of a man and a woman is so structured that every part performs specific functions. Why should any man think of having an intercourse with his fellow man in his anus or his thigh? Same-sex marriage when looked at from the perspective of St. Augustine's theory is a product of wrong judgment occasioned by lack of divine illumination. It is therefore a practice that is not in conformity with the natural and divine law. Marriage was originally designed to be heterosexual and anything far from that is bestial, inhuman, unjustifiable and a slap on human sensitivity. This is why Obioha warned "man no doubt is a composite of reasons and passion. When the passion and the lower appetite rule over reason, human dignity is set in disarray; reason is to rule over the passion and guide the lower appetite to achieve right end" (131).

The human psychological setting is such that, every person live in the consciousness of his gender and function in the limits of such consciousness. That being the case, if investigation is conducted on same-sex union respondent, one will be shock to discover that, they are conscious of their gender and react accordingly. Biologically, there are different sex hormones in both genders, which controls sexual desire and regulate it accordingly. This desire is always towards the opposite sex. How comes then the desire for same-sex gender? This is as a result of irrationality and wrong judgment made possible by lack of divine illumination.

MORAL IMPLICATION OF THE PHENOMENON OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE ON OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

There is no gain saying the fact that the practice of same-sex marriage is against natural and divine law. It is practiced by cowards who are afraid to face the challenges of life posed by the present of the opposite sex thereby going against natural law. To support this point Marinoff opined "the roles of biology and sexual reproduction are fixed by nature" (206). Also, Umotong and Inusah noted that "It is

common belief that nature has given humanity limitless liberty but constrained by other factors known and unknown and at times beyond human control" (189). Natural law is therefore;

A set of basic methodological requirements for practical reasonableness... which distinguish sound from unsound practical thinking and which, when all brought to bear, provide the criteria for distinguishing between act, that... are reasonable-all-things - considered ... and acts that are unreasonable-all-things-considered, i.e. between ways of acting that are morally right or morally wrong - thus enabling one to formulate (Finnis 23).

Nature no doubt has provided some standards of living which is expressible in sense and in human conscience. For instance, doing harm to a fellow human being is evil by nature. Being against nature means such phenomena are sickly, abnormal, immoral and unethical. Such practices are not natural. It's obscene, indecent and immoral. Same-sex marriage falls within these phenomena.

Apart from this is it also a violation of divine law and such violation goes with penalty. According to Udo and Etukakpan "violation of divine law cannot escape the wrath of the supernatural force" (147). From the foregoing, what the practice entails in the contemporary society is that it demeaning marriage of the biblical standard; therein bring about the neglect of moral principle and violation of natural cum divine law. It brings about stigmatization and engenders social neglect and isolation. Guha reports incident of stigmatization on same-sex respondent divorce. He writes "...the institutionalization of the right to same-sex marriage reported cases of public shame followed by guilt and disappointment" (NP). Such disappointment can come in the form of negating the right of children from the love of a father and mother. It also creates confusion of identity and role of respective gender, thus, setting the younger generation in disarray. This actually causes disjuncture in relationships with families.

The idea of reproduction and family making through the natural process of heterosexuality is very important and morally acceptable. Through divine arrangement God brought a man and a woman together for the purpose of procreation. An attempt to compliment this purpose by adopting a child due to same-sex union is morally bad as it is against natural and divine arrangements.

CONCLUSION

Augustine in his theory of divine illumination agreed that man can only reach certainty of knowledge, judgment, etc when he is divinely illuminated. To be divinely illuminated means that the mind of a person must "participate in the word of God, as God's interior presence to the mind, as Christ dwelling in the human soul and teaching the mind from within, and so forth (Maduka 88). Same-sex marriage orientation which is a deviation from the natural orientation has no element of divine illumination. This is so because divine illumination can only lead the mind to right judgment. Thus, there is

no justification to such a union (be it on economic grounds as some tend to argue) as it is indecent, immoral, neglect to divine law and natural law. Religious organizations, government, societies should therefore reject it in totality. With regards to the relevance of religion in this regard Udo and Olusakin see religion as “potent in using its teachings to shape the moral lives of its adherents” (133). Such teachings we believe will bring about divine illumination thereby helping individuals to make right judgment in line with natural and divine law.

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