



# NATIONAL CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT

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### COMMUNIQUE

#### ISSUED BY THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE ON "THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE STATE ON HOMOSEXUALITY"

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Galatians 1:3-5 NRSV)*

We, the members of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference, in the light of recent discussions among many Ghanaians on homosexuality and on whether or not it should be criminalized, have seen the need to address the theme "*The Catholic Church and the State on Homosexuality*". Homosexuality may be defined as sexual interest in and attraction to members of one's own sex. We will begin by stating what the position of the Catholic Church is on homosexuality.

#### *Biblical Teaching on Homosexuality*

The Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality is based primarily on what the Bible says on this matter. The Bible, which is foundational to Christian beliefs and practices, condemns the practice of homosexuality. In the Old Testament, this practice was seen as a perversion and a pagan abomination. In Lev 18:22 we read, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination". Similarly, in Lev 20:13 we read, "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them". Another passage relevant in this discussion is Gen 19:1-28. While admittedly the text of Gen 19:1-28 does not deal with homosexual people, it does not deny the fact that what the men of Sodom intended to do with the two male guests of Lot constituted homosexual acts (cf. Gen 19:5: the Hebrew verb "*yada*" is a biblical euphemism for sexual relations). Lot's offer to give his two virgin daughters in place of the two male guests shows that he perceived the desire of the men of Sodom as perverted lust. While the idea of intolerance and hostility towards the stranger is present in the text, it is certainly sexual perversion, i.e., their desire to engage in homosexual acts, which is at the root of the crimes of the men of Sodom.

Most of the references to homosexuality in the New Testament occur in the letters of Paul. The clearest is Romans 1:26-27. In the context, Paul is portraying the moral disorder that accompanies the rejection of the knowledge of God in the pagan world. He says, “For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error” (Rom. 1:26-27). Rom 1:26 thus addresses the particular issue of homosexual behaviour between consenting females. Rom. 1:27 is the clearest statement in the New Testament regarding the issue of homosexual behaviour between consenting adult males. Some interpreters suggest that Paul has in mind here sexual relations between men and boys in particular; however, Paul’s indictment seems to include all kinds of homosexual practice, female as well as male, and was not directed against one kind of homosexual practice in distinction from another.

In 1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul speaks of homosexuality. These two verses may be discussed together. In 1 Cor. 6:9 Paul says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts”. In 1 Tim. 1:10 he speaks of “immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine”. The terms “sexual perverts” and “sodomites” in the two passages translate the same Greek word (*arsenokoitai*) which denotes practitioners of homosexuality. However, it needs to be added that Paul does not single out same-sex intercourse as specially perverted or monstrous. He lists it alongside theft, drunkenness and perjury, as well as adultery and murder. It is nevertheless a safe conclusion that, whatever might be said about individual orientations or dispositions, Paul could only have regarded all homosexual erotic and genital behaviour as contrary to the creator’s plan for human life, to be abandoned on conversion (cf. 1 Cor 6:11).

Homosexuality is also incompatible with the creation stories about man and woman in Genesis. In the opening chapters of Genesis, the creation of the sexes by God is presented as having a twofold purpose: men and women are meant to come together in a one-flesh unity of life (Gen 2:24) and to beget children (Gen 1:28). Since sexual activity was seen to be ordered to procreation and the continuance of the human race, any form of sexual activity other than heterosexual intercourse is against nature and is a clear violation of right reason. For the Church, to choose someone of the same sex for one’s sexual activity or for marriage is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of God’s sexual design.

Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life, and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living.

### *The Teaching of the Catholic Church on Homosexuality*

In addition to the biblical material cited above that condemns homosexuality, the Catholic Church makes a distinction between “the homosexual condition or tendency” and “individual homosexual actions”.<sup>1</sup> The Church thus makes a distinction between the homosexual *as a person* and *the acts* that he may carry out as a homosexual person. With regard to the former, the Church does not condemn people for being homosexuals or for having the homosexual tendency. Homosexuals must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. The Church teaches that the intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law. According to Pope Francis, the homosexual person needs to be “respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, and ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression or violence” (*Amoris Laetitia* 250). For this reason, it is not right to inflict physical or other types of violence on homosexuals just because they are homosexuals. Their being homosexuals does not mean that they should be treated like criminals.

The Church insists that homosexuals, also created in the image of God, must enjoy the fundamental human rights that all human beings enjoy. By fundamental human rights, we mean the universal, inviolable and inalienable rights that are due to the human person as a rational being possessing a free will. Human rights protect, or are intended to protect, the dignity of the human person against State and Society. Specific human rights include the right to life, personal liberty and due process of law; to freedom of thought, expression, religion, organization, and movement; to freedom from discrimination on the basis of race, religion, age, language, and sex; to basic education; to employment; and to property. Nevertheless, according to the Church’s understanding of human rights, the rights of homosexuals as persons do not include the right of a man to marry a man or of a woman to marry a woman. For the Church, this is morally wrong and goes against God’s purpose for marriage.

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<sup>1</sup> *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, Persona Humana*, December 29, 1975, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, par. 8.

With regard to “individual homosexual actions”, however, the Church says that they are “intrinsically disordered” and are “in no case to be approved of”.<sup>2</sup> Thus, while the church does not condemn homosexuals for being homosexuals, it condemns the homosexual *acts* that they perform. For the Church also, although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered towards an intrinsic moral evil, and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.

The long-held teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has been that while homosexual people are to be loved and respected and not be discriminated against, homosexual acts are intrinsically immoral and must be condemned. It is for this reason that the Church does not approve of “unions between people of the same sex”. However, following the example of Jesus himself who came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (cf. Luke 5:32 [NRSV]), the Church in its pastoral care is solicitous about the salvation of all God’s children and endeavours to show them God’s love and mercy. Thus, homosexuals should not be criminalized just for being homosexuals. Neither should they be maltreated nor attacked for being homosexuals. It is neither a sin nor a crime to be a homosexual. It is the acts that they perform that are sinful and should be condemned.

### *The State on Homosexuality*

The Church recognizes that the State has a duty to carry out in this matter of homosexuality. With regard to homosexual acts, while the Church speaks of them as sins, the State does not use such language. For the State, whose duty it is to enact laws to govern the citizenry, the language used is that of crime. What then is a crime? “Crime” may be defined as an action or omission, which constitutes an offence and is usually deemed socially harmful or dangerous and is punishable by law. In the light of this definition, homosexual acts from the point of view of the State may be criminal in nature. For example, if a homosexual man rapes a teenage boy, that would be deemed a criminal offence, just as the same act carried out by a heterosexual man on a teenage girl would be deemed a criminal offence. In other words, these acts are not in the interest of the nation and, indeed, harm the nation. For this reason, there must be punitive measures to deal with such situations.


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<sup>2</sup> *Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics, Persona Humana*, December 29, 1975, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, par. 8.

Again, the law makers may decide that a man marrying a man or a woman marrying a woman is not in the interest of the nation since, in the long term, it will have an effect on the size of the population of our country if many people do this. In such a case, the law makers will be within their rights to enact laws against that. In such cases, it will be right for the law makers to criminalize such homosexual actions by punitive measures. Thus, we can say that while it is not right to criminalize homosexuals just for being homosexuals, the State is within its right to criminalize *the acts* of homosexuals in the interest of the nation.

In this connection, we can state that the draft bill on “Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values 2021” currently in Parliament is in the right direction, as it seeks to enact laws against criminal homosexual acts. The bill aims to provide for proper human sexual rights and Ghanaian family values, proscribe LGBTQ+ and related activities, and provide for the protection of children, persons who are victims or accused of LGBTTQQAAP+ and related activities, and other persons. We commend our law makers for the effort and time spent on this bill. It is our hope that, when passed into law, it will indeed promote proper human sexual rights and authentic Ghanaian family values which are under threat from homosexual acts. It is also the hope of the Church that the bill will impose punitive measures that are commensurate with the crimes committed.

*“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (2 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV)*

  
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