

PROMOTING CHRISTIAN SEX ETHICS: A KEY TO REDRESSING RISING TREND OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Amunnadi Chukwudi A., PhD

Division of General Studies,

Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani

Email: amuchuks@gmail.com

Abstract

The subject of sex is clearly an issue that is of considerable theoretical and practical relevance to the current Nigerian society. The news on corruption bothering on the political class ravaging the nation economically through all kinds of fraudulent lifestyles no longer makes much headlines in our national dailies. For the story of economic subjugation of the citizenry by the ruling class has become a familiar terrain. What appears to be a worrisome trend therefore is the rising profile of sexual violence against women involving both the religious and political leaders as well as the ordinary men on the street. We therefore appear to be living in an age of sexual revolution that is unleashing all kinds of promiscuous behavior among our citizenry that has far reaching negative consequences on our women population. It is against this backdrop of rising sexual violence in Nigeria that this work seeks to examine the promotion of Christian sexual ethics as the way forward. Christian ethics with reference to our attitudes towards human sexuality embraces a long list of things that people are prohibited from doing. While this may sound too rigid yet biblical context of sexual ethics provides the boundary of behaviour that secures humanity from sliding into the negative aspects of sexual lifestyle that is damaging to the overall good of society. This study invites us to consider the place of Biblical context in our fast changing society that is being overrun by sexual violence. The work involved a survey approach and engaged the use of secondary and primary data.

Keywords: Sex, Ethics, Violence, Governance, lifestyle education

Introduction:

According to online report, it is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced sexual violence from an intimate or non-intimate partner. Moreover it posits that studies have shown that women who have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence report higher rates of depression, having an abortion and acquiring HIV, compared to those who have not..Furthermore it submits that approximately 15 million adolescent girls (aged 15 to 19) worldwide have experienced forced sex (forced sexual intercourse or other sexual acts) at some point in their life. Unfortunately while noting that in the vast majority of countries, adolescent girls are most at

risk of forced sex by a current/former husband, partner or boyfriend only about, one per cent ever sought professional help. This no doubt is based on its assertion that only a third of the global community can afford to provide such help.

Senthilgam (2017) states that sexual violation of women is a universal problem; from the streets of London, Mumbai, Washington to Lagos, the recent outpouring of stories of women underscores the fact that the above problem showed a uniformity in its spread – irrespective of country or culture. What the above submission has therefore made clear is that sexual harassment is everywhere. Furthermore it states while citing the National Population Commission Nigeria that sexual violation of the girl child is on the increase in Nigeria.

Sex again! Many people would be very repulsive to the idea of discussing the issue of sex in the public taking cognizance of our African heritage which reserves sacredness and secrecy to the topic. Unfortunately or fortunately modernity is breaking such age old tradition, and thus has given birth to information driven age. The issue of sex has most recently become one of both theoretical and practical imperative in view of the current Nigerian situation where sexual violence against women has become a norm rather than a misnomer.

There are issues of corruption in Nigeria that has kept the nation veiled from the platform or interphase with the developed global community of nations. These range but are not limited to political, economic, cultural, religious and legal abuse. Nzomiwu (2000) while corroborating the above view states that the story of fraud across the various dispensations of military and civilian leadership is familiar to most Nigerians. However, he observes that the rising issue of current concern regarding the national decay is on the spreading coast of sexual violence in our social life. Furthermore he opines that we are passing through an era of sexual revolution similar to what engulfed Europe in the mid 1960's. Our nation he writes has been eroded by the sex virus engulfing all strata of the society namely the adults, the youths and even the children. Simply put, we are living in an age of sexual madness that drives on the wheels of sexual sensitization through public display, pornography and advertisement. Sexual violence against women in Nigeria appears to be on the increase because sex in today's Nigeria has become so much cheapen that many now engage in very close sexual relationship outside the marriage bond. We appear therefore to be living in an era where most people now believe that purity, faithfulness to marital vow and decency in sexual lifestyle is meant for the trash. Nzomiwu (2000) furthermore corroborates the above view when he states that many Nigerians now have the false ideology or belief that chastity before marriage is not only impossible but completely unacceptable and an

outdated culture. Furthermore he states that in Nigeria today sexual indulgence has not only become very baffling to serious- minded people, it has equally grown very far reaching in its scope. According to him, in order to enjoy so called sexual fantasies, many people now resort to all forms of abnormal sexual habits such as exhibitionism, fetishism, voyeurism, pedophilia, zoophilia, and sexual sadism. What this means is that we are living in an age of sexual violence which has grossly eroded our age old African tradition and heritage as well as our Christian foundational philosophy on sex as a sacred gift from God.

Women, according to Wikipedia online, often face sexual violence at the hands of their family members such as rape, murder, slapping, and kicking. Some of the reasons that were adduced for such abuse include their husbands being drunk, financial issues, and the rejection of a partner's sexual advances. Sexual violence against women in Nigeria largely goes unreported because of the burden of proof necessary for conviction. Besides the high level of social stigma it bring often makes many women reluctant to follow their cases legally. Moreover Nigerian police have not been seen to arrest for sexual assault resulting in less reporting of the act. It equally notes that about 25% of women reported forced sex at the hands of either their current partner or a former partner. Furthermore, the 2008 Demographic and Health Survey showed that over 30.5% of married women have experienced at least one or more forms of physical, emotional or sexual violence in their marriage. Against these backdrops, this discourse sets to unveil the causative factors behind sexual molestation of women as well as the role of Christian sexual ethics as a means of redressing the rising trend of sexual violence against women in Nigerian society.

Theoretical Framework:

According to Stephanie and Rogers (2010), there are pluralistic approaches with respect to the theoretical postulations regarding sex which consequently pose challenge to any serious study on the concept. Most importantly they submit that the above situation has led to the categorization of sex on two epochs namely the primitive and modern thoughts. What this means is that there is an increasing number of theoretical postulations on the subject matter of sex. However this study would employ the divinity theory. This is an off-shoot of the Judeo- Christian **thought which is rooted on the premise that man as a creature of God was designed to unveil** divinity of God through his thought and deed. According to Poston (2000) divinity has to do with immutability of God as an unchanging reality. Applied in this context, divinity theory relates to the unchanging laws, principles and standards of God with respect to sexual conduct. Sex ethics therefore are portrayed as being motivated by a desire to change the lives of the individuals and also to those individuals as the change agent of the wider society. To this end, sex ethics is

represented to provide moral road map as well as mobile community of the faithful who would serve as the change we need in addressing sexual violence as well as the catalyst for positive change in the fight against all kinds of sexual abuses.

Though the above theory has been criticized by some in being static and ethnic bias, by seeking to maintain status, the theory is useful to the study. Consequently, structural functionalism was employed to x-ray how sex ethics can play various roles in addressing the current rising trend of sexual violence in our nation.

Sex Ethics

Sexual ethics or sex ethics (also sexual morality) according to Wikipedia it is the study of ethics within the context of human sexuality, and sexual behaviour. Moreover, it states that it is a branch of normative sciences that seeks to understand, evaluate, and critique the way individuals express their sexual activities within the context of their social, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. Sexual ethics therefore involve issues such as positive and negative sexual lifestyle, theological, cultural, sociological and natural perspectives on sexual standards and roadmap. Sex has historically been an issue of great importance to people in various cultures of the world, and as such is a pertinent topic of discussion and study. As sex is a social practice that varies widely in the ways that it is understood, performed, and discussed, this study of sexual ethics and norms will be based on theological perspectives of Christian religion.

According to Cahill (1995), sex ethics relates to the seeking of biblical guidance for sexual morality which in most cases prescribes rules that embraces such terms as homosexuality, adultery, and divorce. She notes that the problem with the ancient module of sex ethics is that of providing an answer to the question of original audience and the meaning of such prescription, rules as well as the issue of harmonizing the relevance of the old with the modern times.

She then contends that though opinions are diverse with some authors believing in nothing like sex ethics and others in absolute or divine sex ethics, there is need to create a positive functional agenda or teaching on sex that helps in securing cohesion and trust within the context of community group and interpersonal relationships. It is against this backdrop that she notes that the Biblical teachings which prescribes a functional normative platform on sex remains a powerful force for mobilizing a virtuous driven community as predicated on the sexual lifestyle disciplines it promotes. Sex ethics therefore from the context of this work has been described as the science of sexual behavior from the Judeo Christian perspectives. As one who has lived through

more than five decades of life in Nigeria I am only too well aware that the concept of “acceptable” behavior has changed very significantly over the years. This is most significantly true in the realm of human sexuality. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand as written by Laurie Guy (n.d) puts it more pointedly when they posit that sexual behaviour that would have been frowned upon forty years ago is now likely to be seen as an acceptable norm of life by many. Furthermore it posits that sexual ethics broadly speaking relates to community and personal standards which regulate the conduct of sex within and outside of marriage. It is the instrument of defining the good and bad side of sexual activities within the context of divine morality.

Christian ethics with reference to our attitudes towards human sexuality embraces a long list of things that people are prohibited from doing. While this may sound too rigid yet biblical context of sexual ethics provides the boundary of behaviour that secures humanity from sliding into the negative aspects of sexual lifestyle that is damaging to the overall good of society.

Sexual Violence

Cambridge Online Dictionary (2020) defines sexual violence as actions or words that are intended to hurt people. It relates to the use of force or instrument of coercion aimed at inflicting harm which may be physical, economical, psychological or otherwise. Sexual violence in this context refers to the use of force which may be material or immaterial to secure a carnal advantage of a woman; a process which culminates in the unleashing of diverse range of harm on a woman. Such violent act amounts to rape, sexual exploitation and forced prostitution that occur in the context of premarital, marital and extra marital relationships.

The Dangers of Sexual Violence against Women in Nigeria

Sexual violence has continued to increase in contemporary Nigeria. This was equally the view of George (2015) when he posits that violence against women has become a regular part of most women’s experience in Nigeria. Nzomiwu (2012) corroborates the above view when he states that the modern level of obsession with sex poses serious danger or hazards to the Nigerian society especially the youths. This section will therefore attempt to discuss some of the dangers of sexual violence against women in our country.

i) Economic Effects: According to NOIPolls on the week commencing July 22nd, 2019 public opinion poll showed that one of the major challenges faced by Nigerian women is economic subjugation. While many factors contribute to the above problem, Fawole (2008) posits that several negative conditions that result from sexual violence against Nigerian women contribute in no small measure to their economic impoverishment. Some of those conditions

were listed as physical violence, HIV infection, women and girl child trafficking for illicit sex trade. Sexual violence therefore makes women weak physically, by exposing them to hostile men who not only manhandle them physically but also distract them mentally and emotionally thereby endangering their capacity to exploit in full the development of their God given economic potentials. Against this backdrop economic challenges of sexually abused Nigerian women not only threaten their economic survival it also hinder the development and survival of their respective dependants. What this means is that in order to grow strong economies the need to reduce the incidence of sexually abused women in our country cannot be overemphasized.

ii) Unwanted Children Cases: Sexual violence of women in these modern times is expanding the coast of unwanted children in our society. There are rising reported cases of abandoned new born babies on account of unwillingness of their unmarried teenage mothers to keep them because they result from sexual violence. Some of these babies are born and left to die in public garbage dump, and some unfortunate ones thrown into pit toilets. In fact, the rising number of motherless babies' homes today underscores the seriousness of this problem.

iii) Abortion and Deaths: The cases of teenagers dying in the hands of quack doctors because of failed abortion cases continue to be on the increase in our day. These teenage girls who are often victims of sexual violence in most cases resort to road side chemists in order to abort such pregnancies. This option is high due to the financial implication of consulting a qualified medical personnel as well as the fear of being stigmatized publicly because of given birth to illegitimate children. Unfortunately such girls end up being butchered to death in the hands of quack and fake medical personnel. In Aku town in Igbo- Etiti local government area of Enugu State, a teenage girl was reported to have been sent to untimely death when she consulted a road side chemist to engage her in an abortion of her unwanted baby some five years ago. In June 2011 at Taraba state it was reported that Vasty, an expectant mother of 16 years old was cut into pieces by a quack chemist while undergoing an abortion exercise. This incident led to lynching to death of the chemist as well as the boyfriend who impregnated the deceased. All these tend to lend credence to the fact that sexual violence against women is gradually turning into death-bed for the undiscerning Nigerian female population.

Indeed, the Bible is replete with several references showing that an unborn child should be thought of and treated as a person from the moment of conception. Besides, there is increasing scientific evidence supporting the distinct identity of the unborn child. However, abortion to save the life of the

mother is morally justified because it involves making a choice between one “person dying and two persons dying”. Therefore abortion is the wrongful taking of an innocent human life. In other words, all forms of sexual violence that promotes wrongful destruction of innocent child in the womb should be condemned by all and sundry as evil and anti-society.

iv) Psychological Effects: Depression is one of the emotional and psychological effects of sexual violation of women. According to <https://www.rainn.org> online depression is a mood disorder which results when an individual fails to manage crisis that expresses themselves in protracted sorrow, hopelessness and worthlessness. Moreover it posits that such psychological disorder can lead to several problems such as sleeping and eating disorder, and in extreme cases to suicide. While depression can result from neurological or brain damage many women who are sexually abused often end up becoming permanently emotionally unstable a situation which if not managed promptly can lead them to insanity. The above is corroborated by Antai, Oke, Braithwaite & Lopez (2014) when they posit that psychological distress is reported to be highest among women exposed to lifetime sexual violence. Sexual violation of Nigerian women is therefore a highly life threatening problem that should be the concern of all.

Perspectives of Christian Sexual ethics:

Christian sex ethics stems from moral conducts taught by Jesus Christ and documented in Judeo-Christian tradition. This Christological standard has since ages remained the moral standard for determining right and wrong. Till date, the very essence of this moral standard remains relevant in human existence. As revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and confirmed in the writings of the Apostles, Christian sex ethics are visible in the following.

i) Adultery: The Mosaic Law according to Macdonald (1990) clearly forbids adultery as expressed in the following Scriptures: Ex. 20:14 and Deut.5:18. However going beyond adulterous conduct he posits that Jesus taught His disciples that mere abstinence from the physical act of adultery was not enough---there must be inward purity. Thus Matthew’s writing as stated *inter alia* puts it pointedly; “You have heard that it was said by them of old , You shall not commit adultery, But I say unto you that whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart”. (Math.5:27-28).Christian sex ethics therefore goes beyond recognizing ethical codes to embracing a transformed heart that abhors sexual impurity both in thought and in action. The Old Testament writing on the grave consequence of adultery as an ethical misconduct states that if a man commits adultery with another man’s wife both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.(Leviticus 21:10) Even though, the above penalty was not carried over into New Testament Theology, adultery was still prohibited by Christ as made

evident by his charge to the woman caught in adultery to go home and sin no more.(John 8: 4—11) .

Adultery is defined by Chambers Dictionary (New Edition) as voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not that person's legal partner. The above definition is corroborated by Strong (2001) who states that adultery refers to sexual intercourse outside marriage. The word adultery refers to a Hebrew word *na'aph* meaning to apostatize, to break wedlock. It carries the idea of shedding off the demands of one's religion with respect to sexual ethical discipline. That adultery goes beyond physical sexual act is confirmed by Peter in his writing when he states that a person may be proud by outlook such that he could be described as one whose eyes is full of adultery even though he has not physically committed adultery (2 Pet. 2:14). Adultery therefore is an ethical challenge that has both mental and spiritual triggers. Mentally people could be lured through seductive speech, pictures and attires. In the book of Proverbs, we are told of a woman dressed in the attire of a harlot (Proverbs7:10),and who with her much fair speech seduced an undiscerning young man into immoral relationship (Proverbs 7:21). Spiritually speaking adultery is driven by the principles of the unregenerate heart or the unconverted human spirit which is rebellious to divine rules of living as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

ii) Fornication: The English Online Dictionary defines fornication as sexual intercourse especially on the part of unmarried person. In teaching about pre-marital sex or fornication the Bible speaks pointedly by demanding that people flee from fornication as it is the only sin that people engages in with their body(1 Cor.6: 18). The word flee is not a suggestion but a command which by implication underscores that in divine economy, fornication should not be compromised or allowed for any reason. This is because in the physical sense it is a type of the spiritual union with devils. It is against this backdrop that God referred to Israel's idol worship as spiritual adultery or fornication(Jer.3:1-9, Ezek.23:1-45,Hos.,Chpt.4). Moreover fornication is placed alongside the following terms; uncleanness and inordinate affection underlying the fact that it is a product of unhealthy environmental factors as well as warped up emotional disposition. Most importantly Christian sexual ethics provides reasons why fornication should be regarded as an ethical aberration; i)It is harmful to the body, (1 Cor. 6:18), ii) It corrupts the personality (Mark 7:21), iii) It would deny one access to the kingdom of God.(Eph. 5:3-5), iv) It would attract the wrath of God.(Eph.5:6), v) Sanctification rather than fornication should be the rule of Christian conduct. (1 Thess.4:3-7).

. The high rate of sexual violence especially among our unmarried young generation as well as married folk leaves much to be desired. It shows that

the Christian ideological foundation and even our highly held traditional sacred values of sexual purity have been grossly eroded by modernism that drives on the wheel of ethical relativism. Unfortunately the gross damage being done to ourselves at the levels of personal, family, community, national relationships coupled with the corruption it is unleashing on our political, economic, educational, spiritual and socio-cultural foundations are better imagined than experienced. The vicious cycle unleashed on Israel following King David notorious moral lapse underscores how sexual immorality of an individual can trigger the fire that can destroy a whole nation. It was an evil that led him to plot for the murder of one his best army general in order to cover up his sexual immorality but which unfortunately provoked divine judgment upon his house-hold played out as a drama of rape, murder, open sexual violation of his wives by his own son as well as a military conspiracy to topple his throne that nearly cost his life under the auspices of his son Absalom(2 Samuel . Chpts. 11,12 and 13).

iii) Prostitution/Sex Hawking: In Lev.19:29, God condemned prostitution which was a common feature of pagan religion and culture. According to the Scripture, prostitution whether for money as in sex hawking or promotion and of worship of heathen gods through ritual sex promotes wickedness in the society. Sex hawking has become a booming business today in Nigeria that many married women as well as university undergraduates, secondary and primary school children are recruited by big sex merchants to sustain the pool of clients for the ever increasing demand for sex by sex addicts. Unfortunately, it is the rich political class that aid and abet this illicit business through their outrageous salaries and allowances and other fraudulently earned incomes which they deploy in building hotels all over the country instead of establishing manufacturing industries. The irony of this wickedness by our political leaders is that they send their sons and daughters to study in the best universities in America and Europe using the public funds, they embezzled from public treasury at the expense of the children of the poor. Thus while they commit great resources to prepare their wards for both national and global intellectual, economic and political leadership they intentionally deny the children of the poor quality access to education and noble living. As a result majority of women from poor homes becomes easily diverted into prostitution as a way out of poverty not minding the gross violations they are often subjected to sexually and otherwise. Besides by spending billions of naira to build hotels all over the place our leaders knowingly or unknowingly become purveyors of sexual violation of our women generations by trapping them with cheap sex as a way of survival which invariably make them perpetually poor and subjugated to the whims and caprices of the powerful rich.

iv) Incest: The Hebrew restrictive law regarding incest is contained in one verse, 'None of you shall approach any who is near of kin to him, to

uncover their nakedness: I am the LORD' (Lev. 18:6). The term to uncover nakedness refers to sexual intercourse whether in the bonds of incestuous or outside marital relationship. The word incest therefore means having carnal knowledge of one's son, daughter, mother, father, aunt, uncle, mother-in-law, father-in-law, amongst others. The law against incest according to Swaggart (2013) was informed by the need to ensure that as people grow of age they should marry provided that such marriage is marked by restriction. Commenting further on the above restriction Macdonald (1995) notes that from the beginning, God ordained that two shall become one flesh in marriage and that therefore when blood relations marry they defeat God's purpose of the joining of two people to become one. Besides, he posits that modern medicine has confirmed that when blood relatives marry they not only perpetuate the physical or mental weaknesses of their parents in most cases they amplify it.

v) **Marriage:** Modernity has continued to exert great pressure on the traditional way of doing things. These transformations embrace almost every stratum of human existence namely economy, education, communication, government, entertainment, etc. However, the most adversely affected of all the dimensions of life by modern day forces of change is on marriage. Specifically, the incorporation of the concept of same sex marriage by modern day liberalists has remained a catastrophic ethic introduced by sons and daughters of Lucifer to undermine the ancient landmark and divinely ordained rule of a man leaving his house and cleaving to a woman to become one flesh. The Holy Book puts it pointedly when it states *inter alia* :“Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh”.(Gen.2:24). According to Swaggart (2013), the above Bible passage must be viewed as an inspired declaration of God's law of marriage, which points to a unity of persons as opposed to conjunction of bodies or community of interests, or even a reciprocity of affection. The Lord Jesus Christ upheld the above law on marriage when he affirms as follows:

And He answered and said to them ‘Have you not read that He that made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So then they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man put separate. (Math.19:4-6).

Adrienne &Young (2000) corroborates the above view when he posits that the initial creation of man and woman together as the embodiment of the image of God stands as the foundational paradigm of marriage. Furthermore, he submits that monogamy is the marriage of one man and one woman. What this means is that though cultural and religious diversity have continued to

promote differential approach to ethical conduct on marriage the Christian community must remain resolute in defending the divinely ordained standard for marriage especially in these times when the rate of divorce, broken homes and secularization of the moral ethos is on geometric increase.

Conclusion

The unrestricted sexual escapades and abuse in Nigeria today is fuelling an overly sensual society that is increasingly unleashing all kinds of sexual violence on our women population. This sad development has no basis in the Bible nor in Christian morality and not even in our traditional African culture. There is therefore no doubt that this ugly trend is rooted on the invasion and importation of western culture. The above work indentified the dangerous consequences of sexual violence against women in Nigeria today. It noted that pluralistic nature of modern society is advancing great diversity of thought as far as sexual ethics is concerned. However this paper adopted divinity theory as a platform for evolving ethical direction as way forward.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are given as suggestions for the way forward.

- i) Governments should provide relevant legislative backing to Christian ethics relating to sexual conduct as a way to ensuring that those that breach them can be sanctions where necessary.
- ii) Sex education which should give emphasis to appreciation and modeling of Christian sexual ethical lifestyle should be made compulsory in our educational curriculum from primary to tertiary level.
- iii) The religious community, mass media, non-governmental agencies and government should promote campaign on healthy sexual living both in the churches and in the print and electronic media.
- iv) It is appropriate for governments to make and enforce reasonable laws restricting the practice of prostitution as well as the proliferation of hotels that serve as hotbeds for all kinds of commercialized illicit sex.
- v) Production and sale of pornography should be censored among our young generation as they serve as fuel for provoking unguided violent sexual conduct.
- vi) Parents, religious and political leaders must demonstrate commitment to sound sexual character through exemplary leadership.
- vii) Individuals should seek for divine transformation of their hearts through repentance, faith and development of godly company. For according to the wise man, Solomon, he that walks with the wise men shall be wise : but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.(Proverbs 13:20)

viii) Girl child and women education to the level of skill acquisition should be subsidized by government and made compulsory to forestall the increasing rate of women who turn to sex hawking as a last and only resort for survival because of lack of education or relevant skill.

ix) Government should provide effective legislation against abortion.

x) Government should provide maximal socio-economic security for the unemployed, aged, and the physically challenged in order to reduce the rate people who resort to prostitution and other forms of vices for survival.

xi) The political and super rich among us should be given incentive by the government to build industries which is the shortest root out of unemployment, poverty and idleness that serve as incubation ground for sexual illicitism.

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