

Chapter 55

Reconciling Homosexuality and Spirituality in Africa as a Heresy and Survival Strategy: A Critical Study of House of Rainbow (LGBT Church) in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The fight against homophobia in Africa has motivated the emergence of various advocacy initiatives including pro-gay religious forces. One of such initiatives – which have audaciously Christianized homosexuality – has been the Nigerian based, House of Rainbow (LGBT church). Using observations and a critical exploitation of secondary sources, this book chapter critically appraises this church in the light of four socio-religious theories namely, secular humanism, postmodernism, religious liberalism and African conservatism. The chapter is divided into four main parts. The first part provides a theoretical framework composed of four movements namely postmodernism, secular humanism, religious liberalism and African conservatism. The second part explores the origin, mission and structure of House of Rainbow. The third part examines House of Rainbow as postmodernist and religious humanist Christianity; while the last part examines the extent to which the gay-only church is more a survival strategy for Nigerian LGBT people than it is a heresy.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Christianity has witnessed the emergence of various internal and external currents which have tended to affect it in multiple complex ways. In the course of years and decades, it seems subtle deconstruction of religious idioms and post-modernist interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and their

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resultant liberal theologies have (re)defined the face of the Christian faith in many parts of the globe. This is evidenced by the fact that hitherto controversial or “demonized” traditions – such as same sex marriage, gay sexual orientations, transgender relations and the like – are either progressively tolerated or simply “Christianized” in some modern Christian circles. A number of recent studies have, for instance, argued that human reasoning (in the form of secular humanism, relativism/subjectivism, materialism and the like) has taken the lead over spirituality in many global Christian movements, as well as in hitherto fundamentalist Christian circles, spiritual churches and related organizations or industries (Bad News About Christianity, 2014; Bailey, 2015; Colley, 2015; Cusano, 2015; Endong, 2015a,b; Endong & Vareba, 2015; Keller, 2013; Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 2015; Weldon, 2015). In line with the philosophy of secular humanism, laudable issues like human or minority rights are for instance seemingly considered by some schools of thought to be inherently divine and worthy of praise, irrespective of the fact that some of such philosophical orientations may, to an extent, be spiritually questionable. A good example is the LGBT right movement which, being systematically validated by global civil right organizations, is still seriously censured by most conservative and puritanical schools of thought, on religious or cultural grounds. Similarly, in accordance with relativism, multifaceted heresies and forms of religious libertinage have phenomenally been orchestrated in some Christian churches.

Relativism, humanism and materialism have equally created a breeding ground for multiple deviancies as well as worldly and unbiblical “ideals” in some Christian churches, particularly in those based in the Western countries. In an acerb and profound critic of contemporary Christianity, Weerstra (1999) has counted such philosophical neologisms (relativism, materialism, humanism and the like) among the “spiritual poisons” facilitating the syncretism and westernization of Christianity not only in Europe and America but also in Africa and Asia. Weerstra notes that many contemporary Christian denominations (particularly those in the west) have visibly lost their biblical roots (their Judeo-Christian heritage) in favor of a worldly (western) worldview. The lack of vision for evangelism coupled with the compromise on issues like homosexuality and “questionable” minority rights, as well as the moral failure among well-known Christian leaders have all contributed to moral and spiritual demise in good number of Christian movements.

As clearly diagnosed by critics, a good number of charismatic Christian leaders have compromised on homosexuality (Bailey, 2015; Brock, 2015a; Endong, 2015a, b; Weerstra, 1999). Succumbing to the irresistibly strong pro-gay proselytism led by the West (America and western democracies), they have either supported and/or joined the contentious movement for the queering of the church or have simply formulated sympathy strategies for the LGBT people. The American evangelicals who are – for instance – known to have once been at the root of the anti-gay movement in America and Africa are today divided over the issue of the morality of homosexuality. Prominent figures of this spiritual community such as Franklin Graham and Tony Campolo have, for instance, surprisingly reversed themselves on sexual ethics to non-hesitantly join the postmodern Christian campaign for the inclusion of same-sex marriage in the Church. Surprisingly enough, some of these ecclesiastic figures claim to have adopted such an orientation “under divine guidance or inspiration”. In tandem with this, Bailey (2015) quotes Campolo as confiding that “it has taken countless hours of prayer, study, conversation and emotional turmoil to bring me to the place where I am finally ready to call for the full acceptance of Christian gay couples into the Church” (p. 29). Not only prominent western ecclesiastic figures are in support of tolerating gay sexual ethics and the LGBT movement in Christian circles. Iconic African theologians and church leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu are known to be major apologists of the LGBT right movement in Africa. Such African apologists severely shun Christian activism against homosexu-

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