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THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (GCBC) ISSUES A DECLARATION ON RECENT LGBTQI ACTIVITIES IN GHANA

The Executive Secretary of the National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values, Lawyer Moses Foh-Amoaning, has condemned the European Union (EU) in Ghana for asking Ghanaians to respect and tolerate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) individuals in the country. He said the EU should not impose their so-called values and beliefs on Ghanaians who are against homosexuality. He was reacting to a post issued by the EU's office in Ghana for the rights of the LGBTQI community to be respected and tolerated. Lawyer Moses Foh-Amoaning recently waged a crusade for the shutdown of a new office space for the LGBTQI movement in Ghana. He said the laws, values and cultural beliefs in Ghana do not allow for such practices.

We, the Catholic Bishops of Ghana, write to condemn all those who support the practice of homosexuality in Ghana. We also write to support the position of Lawyer Moses Foh-Amoaning and the Coalition who for years has been championing the crusade against homosexuality. We also commend other individuals who have spoken in condemnation of this practice. We do this because the Roman Catholic Church is opposed to this abominable practice. Our reasons will become clear from the following.

The Bible and Homosexuality

What is the position of the Bible on homosexuality? In the Old Testament, it 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 dealing with homosexuality is Gen 19:1-28. According to this passage, all the men in the sinful city of Sodom are depicted as threatening homosexual rape on the two male visitors given hospitality by Lot (Gen 19). These men were punished with death for their desire to commit this abomination.

Most of the references to homosexuality in the New Testament occur in the letters of Paul. The clearest is Rom 1:26-27. In this passage, Paul argues that pagans, even without the biblical revelation, ought to have honoured the true God but they turned instead to idolatry. As a consequence of this primary disorder, God gave them over to sexual disorder as well, both women and men exchanging natural relations for unnatural ones: "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).

This passage (Rom 1:26) is the only biblical text that 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 behavior between consenting adult males. Some interpreters suggest that Paul has in mind here sexual relations between men and boys (pederasty); 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 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:10 Paul speaks of homosexuality. These two verses may be discussed together. In 1 Cor 6:9-10 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 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God". In 1 Tim. 1:10 Paul speaks of "immoral persons, sodomites, kidnapers, 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 (*arsenokoi*) and refer to homosexuals.

The Catholic Church's Teaching on Homosexuality

The Catholic Church has addressed the issue of homosexuality in a number of documents. The Church's teaching on homosexuality can be summarized as follows:

(1) The Church sees the practice of homosexuality as something condemned by the Scriptures and cites in its documents the biblical passages mentioned above that condemn homosexuality. In addition to these passages, the Church sees the practice of homosexuality as being incompatible with the creation stories relating 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. 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.

(2) The Church makes a distinction between "the homosexual condition or tendency" and "individual homosexual actions". For the Church, the latter is "intrinsically disordered" and is "in no case to be approved of". In other words, while the Church does not condemn people for *being* homosexuals or for having the homosexual tendency, it condemns the homosexual *acts* that homosexuals perform.

(3) 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.

(4) The Church rejects the unfounded and demeaning assumption that the sexual behaviour of homosexual persons is always and totally compulsive and, therefore, they should not be blamed for their homosexual acts.

(5) Even though the Church strongly condemns homosexual acts, it insists that the rights of homosexuals as persons should be respected. Homosexuals are also human beings, created in the image of God, and they should enjoy the same fundamental human rights that all people enjoy. But what are these human rights? By 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.

In the light of the foregoing, it is not right to subject homosexuals to any form of harassment simply because they are homosexuals. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law. Homosexuals must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. 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). Families with LGBT members need “respectful pastoral guidance” from the church and its pastors so that gays and lesbians can fully carry out God’s will in their lives (*Amoris Laetitia*, 250).

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. We should also point out that the European Court for Human Rights has ruled that same-sex “marriages” are not considered a human right, making it clear that homosexual partnerships do not in fact equal marriages between a man and a woman. The ruling was announced 9 June 2016 in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.

In the light of the foregoing, we call upon the President of the Republic and Parliament to state unambiguously their position on the matter of homosexuality and its practice in Ghana. We also call on the Government of Ghana to close down the LGBTQI office space that was recently opened in Accra. Finally, we also urge the Executive and the Legislature never to be cowed down or to succumb to the pressure to legalize the rights of LGBTQIs in Ghana.

God bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong!



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