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COMMENTS ON THE RESPONSE FROM THE INTERFAITH DIVERSITY NETWORK OF WEST AFRICA TO THE DECLARATION OF THE GCBC ON RECENT LGBTQI ACTIVITIES IN GHANA

In a statement dated February 20, 2021, The Interfaith Diversity Network of West Africa (IDNOWA) issued a response to the Declaration of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference on recent LGBTQI activities in Ghana. While thanking the author(s) for their desire to contribute to the national dialogue on homosexuality in Ghana, there are several statements and assertions in the said response that need to be commented on for the sake of clarity and truth.

1. Declaration instigates violence against LGBTQI

Even though the declaration of the Bishops clearly states that the dignity of LGBTQI people should be respected because they are also children of God created in his image and likeness, the author(s) of the said response stated repeatedly that the Catholic Bishops were against LGBTQI people. What the church disapproves of are *homosexual acts* which she considers as intrinsically immoral. The inherent immorality of homosexual acts makes it impossible for the church to accept public advocacy and promotion of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. People with homosexual inclinations are subjects of the Church's pastoral care as anybody else in the Church and outside of it. The impression created by the response of IDNOWA that the Bishops are instigating violence against LGBTQI people is incorrect and therefore quite unfortunate.

2. Pope Francis' Comment

The reference to what Pope Francis said recently in relation to state laws for civil unions of same sex couple has been distorted by a section of the media which supports and promotes homosexuality and is always desperate for some form of approval from the Church. The authors of the response of IDNWA could have done the Ghanaian public a good service by mentioning the official clarification from the Vatican following the media distortion of the Pontiff's words.

3. Biblical Interpretations

The statement of IDNOWA claims that the Bishops present biblical interpretations that are outdated according to the standards of the Roman Catholic Church. This is obviously false. The author(s) makes reference to a book published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission entitled: *"What is man? An Itinerary of Biblical Anthropology"* (2019). The 10-page treatment of homosexuality is found in chapter 3 entitled "The Human Family." It must be noted from the outset that the respected Pontifical Biblical Commission offers informed opinions on biblical interpretations but does not teach in the name of the Roman Catholic Church. The Commission itself stated that the book was designed as a launching pad for further biblical, theological and philosophical study. Its interpretations are not magisterial and it does not represent the theological standard of the Roman Catholic Church. While the Commission rightly states that the text of Genesis 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 *yāda'* 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*. If the author(s) of the IDNOWA response had bothered to do a little bit of research, they would have noticed what other bible scholars and theologians and the official Church organ which oversees the Roman Catholic Church's normative teaching have said in reaction to the interpretation of the Sodom and Gomorrah story in Genesis 19. With regard to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, for instance, its Secretary, Archbishop Giacomo Morandi issued a statement on December 20, 2019, four days after the book of the Biblical Commission was published, indicating clearly that the publication of the book did not constitute an 'opening' to unions between persons of the same sex as some people erroneously had claimed. He reminded all who were tempted to misuse the opinions expressed in the book that the book itself in no. 185 affirms: "The institution of marriage constituted by a stable relationship between husband and wife is constantly presented as evident and normative in the entire biblical tradition. There are no examples of a legally recognized 'union' between persons of the same sex."

Let us now turn to the term "*arsenokoitai*" in I Corinthians 6:9ff. The word is a compound of "male" and "intercourse." While its meaning is not easy to determine because of its seldom use in extant literature of the period, it is generally understood as referring to male homosexual offender. In fact, the highly rated *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (by F. Arndt William and F. Wilbur Gingrich) translates *arsenokoites* (singular) as "a male who practises homosexuality, pederast, sodomite." The claim by the IDNOWA response that it refers to exploitative sexual relationships between men, and not to durable ones based on love and mutual care is neither supported by the immediate context of I Corinthians 6:7-11 nor by what we know of the Greco-Roman society of the time. Paul is here warning his Corinthian Christians against engaging in homosexual acts which he considers as sinful and undignified of the Christian.

The long-held teaching of the Roman Catholic Church has been that while homosexual people, i.e., those who have an erotic inclination towards others of the same sex, are to be loved and respected and not discriminated against, homosexual *acts* are intrinsically immoral. It is for this reason that the Church does not approve of "unions between people of the same sex". 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 her pastoral care is solicitous about the salvation of all God's children and endeavours to show them God's love and mercy.



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