

**THE CHURCH OF NIGERIA (ANGLICAN COMMUNION)'S  
STANCE ON HOMOSEXUALITY AND LESBIANISM:  
THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL REFLECTIONS**

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## Abstract

This study provides a multi-faceted analysis of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion's firm opposition on homosexuality and lesbianism. It employs qualitative and historical research methodologies. The article traces the ecclesiastical development of the Church of Nigeria from its missionary origins to its current status as an autonomous province within global Anglicanism. It argues that the church's stance is not an isolated doctrinal position, but a central pillar of its post-colonial identity, representing a decisive rupture from the theological liberalism of Western Anglican provinces. The research delves into the conservative biblical hermeneutic underpins this position, contrasting it systematically with the revisionist and affirming hermeneutics prevalent in parts of Europe and North America. Furthermore, the article explores the profound socio-cultural, ethical, and legal implications of this stance within the Nigerian context, examining its alignment with national law, its impact on LGBTQ+ individuals, and its role in shaping national identity. The findings reveal that the Church of Nigeria's position, solidified through actions like the amendment of its constitution and leadership in the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), has fundamentally altered the balance of power within the Anglican Communion, making it a defining voice for Global South conservatism. This study contributes to the literature by examining the economic dimensions of this stance, the media strategies employed, and the complex post-colonial dynamics that inform what is ultimately a struggle over authority, biblical interpretation, and the very soul of global Anglicanism

**Keywords:** Anglican Communion, Homosexuality, Biblical Hermeneutics, Socio-Cultural Implications.

## **Introduction: A Communion in Crisis**

The Anglican Communion, a worldwide church, with over 85 million members, finds itself in a state of profound and persistent crisis. The central point of contention—the compatibility of homosexual relationships and leadership with Christian doctrine and practice—has escalated from a theological disagreement into a full-blown schism that threatens the very structures of communion that have held the global church together for centuries. This conflict represents what theologian Ephraim Radner has termed "the death of a church," referring not to numerical decline but to the fracturing of ecclesial communion over irreconcilable differences in biblical interpretation and ethical practice.

At the epicenter of this conflict stands the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), a province that has grown exponentially in the last half-century to become numerically the largest and arguably the most influential conservative voice within the Communion. From approximately 25 dioceses in 1979 to over 164 dioceses today, the Nigerian church's demographic weight gives it unprecedented leverage in global Anglican politics. This article posits that the Church of Nigeria's opposition to homosexuality is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood through a purely theological lens. It is, rather, a synthesis of deep-seated biblical interpretation, a conscious construction of a post-colonial identity, and a strategic response to the perceived moral decay of the Western world. The church's stance represents a

deliberate act of self-differentiation from the "Global North," particularly the Episcopal Church in the United States (ECUSA) and the Anglican Church of Canada, which are seen as having capitulated to secular humanism.

The scholarly literature on this conflict has evolved significantly. Early works like Miranda Hassett's "Anglican Communion in Crisis" (2007) documented the emergence of the conflict primarily from an American perspective. Subsequent scholarship, particularly from African theologians like Esther Mombo and Joseph Galgalo, has highlighted the post-colonial dimensions of the struggle. More recent analyses, such as Phil Groves' "The Anglican Communion and Homosexuality" (2008), have attempted to present multiple perspectives, though often still weighted toward Western viewpoints. This study builds upon, but significantly expands this literature by placing the Church of Nigeria's agency at the center of the analysis, examining not just its theological arguments but the socio-economic, media, and institutional strategies that have made it such a powerful force in contemporary global Christianity.

This study examines how the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) has constructed and sustained its opposition to homosexuality, interrogating the theological, historical and socio-cultural factors that inform its stance. To this end, the research pursues several key objectives: firstly, to trace the church's historical development from a mission field to a theologically assertive province; secondly, to analyse the conservative biblical hermeneutics

underpinning its position; and thirdly, to critically engage with revisionist hermeneutics within the wider Anglican Communion. Furthermore, it seeks to examine the socio-cultural, ethical, and legal implications of the church's stance within Nigeria, and finally, to assess its impact on the global Anglican Communion, particularly regarding shifting dynamics of power and authority. Employing a qualitative and historical methodology through document analysis of theological texts, official statements, legal frameworks, and scholarly literature, the study finds that the Church of Nigeria's opposition is not merely doctrinal. Instead, it is central to its post-colonial identity, reinforced by national law, cultural norms, and strategic institutional actions—including constitutional amendment and leadership in GAFCON—which have collectively repositioned the church as a defining conservative voice within global Anglicanism.

To fully grasp the Nigerian position, one must appreciate its historical trajectory. The story of Nigerian Anglicanism is one of moving from a dependent mission field to an independent, self-propagating church, and finally to a powerful, sending church that now exports its conservative theology back to the West. This journey has instilled a deep sense of confidence and a conviction that it is the guardian of "historic Anglican faith." This paper will explore this journey through six main sections: a detailed history of the Church of Nigeria's rise and self-definition; a thorough examination of the theological hermeneutics at play; a critical engagement

with the opposing, affirming perspectives; a nuanced analysis of the socio-cultural and ethical ramifications within Nigeria and the wider Communion; and finally, a conclusion that synthesizes these threads and considers future trajectories.

## **2. Historical Foundations: From Mission Field to Theological Powerhouse**

The historical narrative of the Church of Nigeria is crucial for understanding its contemporary stance. Its evolution from a colonial appendage to a leading voice in global Christianity provides the essential context for its assertive theological conservatism. This historical journey reveals a pattern of increasing self-confidence and a willingness to challenge established centers of authority, culminating in the current conflict over sexuality.

**2.1. The Missionary Epoch and the Seeds of Independence** Christianity arrived in what is now Nigeria in the 15th century with Portuguese Augustinian and Capuchin monks, but it was the arrival of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the mid-19th century that firmly planted Anglicanism in Nigerian soil. The work of Henry Townsend and, most significantly, Samuel Ajayi Crowther—a Yoruba ex-slave ordained as the first African Anglican bishop—established a vision for a native pastorate that would eventually become a reality (Fape, 2019). Crowther's episcopacy was groundbreaking, yet it was also marked by persistent paternalism and financial control from London. The infamous Niger Delta crisis, where European missionaries challenged Crowther's authority and the competence of African

clergy, revealed the racial limitations embedded in the missionary enterprise and planted early seeds of resentment against external control.

This early tension between indigenous leadership and foreign control created a legacy of suspicion toward Western theological innovation. The eventual push for autonomy was, therefore, not merely administrative but theological. The inauguration of the Church of the Province of Nigeria on February 24, 1979, was a landmark event in this journey toward self-determination. The bishop of Ibadan, Most Rev. Timothy O. Olufosoye was elected as the first Archbishop of the province. Its constitution explicitly committed to maintaining the faith "as the Lord has commanded in His Holy word and as the same received and taught by the Church of England in the Book of Common Prayer and the ordinal of the year 1662 and the 39 articles of religion" (Usikaro, 2020). This commitment to historic formularies was not nostalgic but strategic, providing a stable theological foundation from which to later resist modernizing trends that were perceived as another form of Western imposition.

As the first Archbishop, Olufosoye's primary task was the delicate work of transitioning from a collection of dioceses under a foreign province to a cohesive, self-governing national church. His was an era of institution-building. He oversaw the implementation of the new constitution and worked to harmonise the diverse diocesan practices into a unified provincial identity. His leadership, though foundational, was necessarily focused on internal

consolidation, ensuring the new province had a stable and functional administrative and synodical structure.

Primate Olufosoye, a scholar and a gentleman, faced the unenviable task of building consensus among strong-willed bishops from diverse ethnic and theological backgrounds. His tenure was marked by the careful navigation of regional sensitivities. A key challenge was establishing the financial self-sufficiency of the new province, weaning it off from the reliance on structures that had been centered in Sierra Leone and the UK. He also had to represent the young church on the global stage, establishing its identity within the Anglican Consultative Council and at the Lambeth Conference. His quiet, diplomatic leadership provided the essential stability that allowed for the explosive growth that would follow under his successor, The Most Joseph Abiodun Adetiloye.

**2.2. Exponential Growth and Institutional Consolidation:** Under the leadership and visionary Primacy of Joseph Abiodun Adetiloye (1988-1999) the Church of Nigeria experienced explosive growth that transformed its institutional identity. He oversaw the creation of numerous missionary dioceses as part of a "decade of evangelism" that responded to the Lambeth Conference's call of 1988. This growth was not merely numerical; it was structural and missiological. The creation of internal provinces (first three, then eventually fourteen) allowed for more effective administration and a

decentralization of power that strengthened the church's national presence and resilience (Usikaro, 2020).

By the time Primate Peter Jasper Akinola (2000-2009) assumed leadership, the Church of Nigeria had the demographic weight to back its theological convictions. Akinola's tenure saw the number of dioceses rise from 78 to 164, a statistic he and other leaders often cited as evidence of God's blessing on their orthodox stance, in contrast to the numerical decline in more liberal Western provinces. This narrative of growth-as-blessing became a powerful rhetorical tool, framing theological conservatism as the path to vitality and liberalism as a recipe for ecclesial death. The church's vision statement under Akinola—"bible based, spiritually dynamic, united, disciplined, self-supporting, committed to pragmatic evangelism"—explicitly linked biblical fidelity with institutional health and evangelistic success.

**2.3. The Legacy of Lambeth 1998: A Line in the Sand** The 1998 Lambeth Conference proved to be a pivotal moment that set the stage for the current schism. Resolution 1.10, passed by a majority of 526 to 70 bishops, became the definitive touchstone for the conservative position. The resolution stated that homosexual practice was "incompatible with Scripture" and opposed both the blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships. However, it also contained a clause calling for "listening to the experience of homosexual persons."

This resolution created a complex legacy. For conservatives, especially in the Global South, it represented the clear, mind-of-the-communion position based on biblical authority. For revisionists, the listening process suggested an openness to change and development of doctrine. The subsequent actions of Western provinces, which began to move toward greater inclusion, were seen by the Global South not as a legitimate development of doctrine but as a blatant violation of a shared agreement. The political maneuvering around this resolution—the lobbying, the drafting, and the eventual voting—revealed deep fissures that would only widen in the coming years. For the Church of Nigeria, Lambeth 1.10 became a non-negotiable standard, a line in the sand that, when crossed, would justify radical action.

**2.4. The Tipping Point:** Consecration of Gene Robinson and the Nigerian Response The consecration of Gene Robinson, an openly gay man in a partnered relationship, as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 by ECUSA was the catalytic event that turned disagreement into open schism. For the Church of Nigeria, this was not simply a misguided decision; it was an "apostasy" that represented a direct repudiation of biblical authority and the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference. Archbishop Akinola's response was swift and decisive, capturing the depth of the offense felt: "This is an attack on the Church of God, a Satanic attack on God's church."

The Nigerian response was both ecclesiastical and constitutional. In November 2003, the church declared itself in "impaired communion" with

ECUSA. The most profound symbolic action came in 2005 with the amendment of the Church of Nigeria's constitution. The original text defined the church as being in communion with the See of Canterbury. The amended version redefined the Anglican Communion as "all Anglican Churches, Dioceses and Provinces that hold and maintain the Historic Faith, Doctrine, Sacrament and Discipline of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church" (Okwuosa, 2022). This was a theological declaration of independence. It shifted the basis of Anglican identity from a historical relationship with Canterbury to a shared adherence to a particular interpretation of doctrine, a move that fundamentally challenged the existing ecclesial structures and asserted a new basis for global Christian fellowship.

**2.5. The GAFCON Movement:** Creating a New Center of Gravity the Church of Nigeria, under Primate Akinola's dogged leadership, was a founding force behind the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON). The first gathering in Jerusalem in 2008, attended by over 300 bishops and subsequent boycott of the Lambeth Conference, was a clear statement that a significant portion of the Communion would no longer operate within the existing structures of authority. GAFCON was not just a meeting; it was the birth of a movement and a parallel ecclesial structure.

The 2008 Jerusalem Statement declared that the "communion is now fractured and the fabric of our life together torn," largely due to the actions of the Western provinces (GAFCON, 2008). It established a Primates' Council and

laid the groundwork for what would become a separate ecclesial body for conservative Anglicans. The Church of Nigeria's role in sponsoring bishops from poorer African nations to attend GAFCON underscored its new role as a patron of global conservatism, a dramatic reversal of the traditional flow of theological and financial capital from the Global North to the Global South (Gbesan, 2020). This leadership has been continued by subsequent Primates Nicholas Okoh and Henry Ndukuba, who have reinforced the church's opposition and supported the growth of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) as a conservative alternative to ECUSA.

#### **2.6. Case Study: The Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA)**

A concrete manifestation of the Church of Nigeria's new assertive role has been its establishment of the Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA). Created in 2005, CANA provided an ecclesial home for conservative American congregations that had broken away from ECUSA over its liberal stance on homosexuality. In an ironic reversal of the colonial paradigm, the Church of Nigeria began appointing bishops for North America, providing oversight and legitimacy to dissenting groups.

This move was not without controversy. It was criticized as a violation of traditional Anglican territorial boundaries and an act of cross-provincial intervention. However, for the Church of Nigeria, it represented a necessary pastoral response to what it viewed as the abandonment of biblical faith by the established American church. The legal battles that ensued over church

property between CANA congregations and ECUSA highlighted the high stakes of this conflict. The Church of Nigeria's willingness to engage in these complex and expensive legal struggles demonstrated its commitment to the cause and its financial capacity to sustain a global conservative network. CANA eventually became a founding member of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) in 2009, cementing the Church of Nigeria's role as a key player in creating alternative Anglican structures outside the traditional Communion framework.

### **3. Theological Rationale: A Conservative Hermeneutic of Scripture**

The Church of Nigeria's position is articulated not as a matter of cultural preference, but as a defense of biblical orthodoxy. Its hermeneutical approach is characterised by a high view of Scripture's authority and a commitment to a plain-sense reading of the text, particularly regarding sexual ethics. This approach is rooted in a particular understanding of biblical inspiration, interpretation, and application that stands in stark contrast to the methods employed by revisionist theologians.

**3.1. The Creation Paradigm: The Heterosexual Norm:** The foundational argument against homosexual practice is derived from the creation narratives in Genesis. The Church of Nigeria, echoing the work of conservative theologians like Robert Gagnon, posits that God's intentional design for humanity is explicitly and exclusively heterosexual. Genesis 1:27-28 ("So God created mankind in his own image... male and female he created them... Be

fruitful and multiply") and the detailed account of the creation of Eve as a "helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18-24) are interpreted as establishing a divine and non-negotiable pattern for human relationships (Oloye, 2018).

From this perspective, the complementarity of male and female is not a cultural construct but an ontological reality embedded in creation itself. Marriage is thus defined by this biological and functional complementarity, which finds its natural expression in procreation. Any sexual activity outside this paradigm is seen as a rejection of the created order itself. As Primate Nicholas Okoh stated unequivocally, "the basics of Christian marriage are between man and woman" (Vanguard, 2021). This view frames homosexuality not as an alternative lifestyle but as a fundamental disordering of God's creative intent a violation of the natural law that God established at the beginning.

**3.2. The Condemnation of Specific Acts:** The "Clobber Passages" The church's position is heavily supported by a specific set of biblical texts that directly address homosexual acts. These passages, often called the "clobber passages" by LGBTQ+ advocates, form the bedrock of the conservative ethical position.

The Levitical Holiness Code: Leviticus 18:22 ("You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination") and 20:13 ("...they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them") are cited as clear, universal moral prohibitions. While acknowledging that the Old Testament contains

ceremonial laws no longer binding on Christians (e.g., dietary restrictions), the Church of Nigeria categorizes these verses with moral laws that reflect God's eternal character. The strong language of "abomination" (toebah in Hebrew) is understood to signify something that is morally repugnant to God Himself, transcending its original cultural context.

**The Pauline Corpus:** The New Testament passages are considered even more authoritative for Christian ethics. Romans 1:26-27 is pivotal, describing same-sex relations as "unnatural" (*para physin*) and resulting from idolatry and a rejection of God. This passage is particularly important because it addresses both male and female homosexual behavior and places it within a broader theological narrative of humanity's fall into sin. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 include Greek terms (*malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*) that are interpreted as referring to the passive and active partners in homosexual acts, respectively, and are listed among vices that bar one from the Kingdom of God (Oloye, 2018). The reference to *arsenokoitai* is significant as it appears to be a compound word possibly derived from the Greek translation of the Levitical prohibitions, creating an inter-biblical linkage between Old and New Testament condemnations.

**The Sin of Sodom:** Although scholarly debate exists about the primary sin of Sodom (with some emphasizing pride and lack of hospitality), the story in Genesis 19 is often invoked as a paradigm of God's judgment on sexual immorality, including homosexual behavior. This interpretation is bolstered

by references in Jude 1:7, which states that Sodom and Gomorrah "gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion."

The Church of Nigeria's hermeneutic treats these texts as transparent and universally applicable. The historical-critical questions about the specific cultural forms of homosexuality in the ancient world (e.g., pederasty, temple prostitution, exploitative relationships) are largely dismissed as attempts to explain away the plain meaning of Scripture. From this perspective, the Bible's witness against homosexual practice is consistent, unambiguous, and binding for all times and cultures.

**3.3. The "Unchangeable" Nature of God and Moral Law** underpinning the Nigerian hermeneutic is a particular understanding of God's nature and moral law. This view posits that God's character is immutable (Malachi 3:6) and that the moral principles derived from His character are equally unchanging. While cultures and circumstances may change, the fundamental moral law established by God does not. This perspective draws from the Natural Law tradition, which argues that certain moral truths are embedded in the fabric of creation and can be known through reason and revelation.

From this vantage point, the attempt to reinterpret Scripture to accommodate homosexual relationships represents a capitulation to cultural relativism. It is seen as elevating contemporary Western social values over timeless biblical truth. The Church of Nigeria's stance is thus framed as a defense of objective morality against subjective experience. As expressed by numerous Nigerian

leaders, the question is not about being "on the right side of history" but about being on the right side of God's eternal Word.

**3.4. Pneumatology and Discernment:** The Spirit and the Word A key point of divergence between conservative and revisionist Anglicans concerns the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the church. The Church of Nigeria operates with a pneumatology that tightly links the Spirit's work to the revealed Word of Scripture. The Holy Spirit is understood as the divine author of Scripture who illuminates its meaning for believers but does not lead the church into truths that contradict what is already written.

This stands in contrast to revisionist pneumatologies that emphasize the Spirit's ongoing, dynamic work in leading the church into "new truth." From the Nigerian perspective, this appeal to the Spirit's guidance apart from Scripture opens the door to subjectivism and makes contemporary experience a higher authority than biblical revelation. The dramatic growth of conservative churches in Africa is often cited as evidence of the Spirit's blessing on their faithfulness to Scripture, while the decline of liberal Western churches is interpreted as divine judgment on their departure from biblical authority.

**3.5. The Call to Holiness and Repentance** Within this theological framework, the church's response to individuals experiencing same-sex attraction is framed as a pastoral call to holiness and repentance. The language used, as seen in the original document and numerous public statements, can be

stark, describing homosexuality as a "perversion," "satanic," and "the way of death." The prescribed solution is not affirmation but transformation through repentance, faith in Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The church sees its role as compassionately calling people out of a sinful lifestyle, which it believes is destructive to the individual and the community. This perspective views the revisionist churches' affirmation as a failure of pastoral responsibility, a withholding of the true path to freedom and salvation. The ideal outcome, from this conservative standpoint, is either celibacy or a change of orientation through spiritual transformation, though the latter is increasingly questioned even within conservative circles.

#### **4. Critical Engagement: The Revisionist and Affirming Hermeneutic**

To present a balanced academic analysis, it is essential to engage seriously with the theological arguments of those Anglican provinces and scholars who affirm LGBTQ+ relationships. Their hermeneutical approach offers a stark contrast to the Nigerian position and represents a fundamentally different way of understanding biblical authority, interpretation, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

**4.1. Historical-Critical Reinterpretation of Key Texts** Affirming scholars argue that the biblical writers had no conceptual framework for understanding sexual orientation or consensual, monogamous same-sex partnerships. Therefore, they contend, the traditional application of the "clobber passages" to contemporary LGBTQ+ relationships is a misreading born of anachronism.

Leviticus in Context: Scholars like John Boswell and Martti Nissinen argue that the Levitical prohibitions were part of a purity code (the Holiness Code) designed to distinguish Israel from its Canaanite neighbours, whose religious practices often involved cultic prostitution as part of fertility rituals. The concern was primarily with idolatry and boundary maintenance, not with loving, covenantal relationships between people of the same sex (Boswell, 1980). The Hebrew word *toebah*, translated as "abomination," often refers to ritual impurity rather than inherent moral evil, particularly in contexts involving Gentile practices.

Paul and the Greco-Roman World: Similarly, it is argued that when Paul condemns same-sex relations in Romans 1, he is referring to the specific practices of the Greco-Roman world. These would have included pederasty (sexual relationships between adult men and adolescent boys), the predatory use of slaves, and excessive lust associated with idolatrous practices. Paul's concept of "natural" (*physis*) is understood not in terms of modern biological orientation but in terms of conventional social roles. He was not, affirming scholars contend, addressing the phenomenon of a genetically-based sexual orientation expressed in a faithful, covenanted relationship (Countryman, 2007). The terms *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* in the Corinthian and Pastoral epistles are similarly interpreted as referring to specific exploitative practices (male prostitution, abusive pederasty) rather than homosexual orientation *per se*.

**4.2 The Testimony of Experience** and Reason Anglican theology has traditionally been based on a "three-legged stool" of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. Affirming theologians argue that the lived experience of faithful, monogamous LGBTQ+ Christians constitutes a form of "reason" that must be brought into dialogue with Scripture. The scientific consensus on the natural and largely immutable nature of sexual orientation for many people provides another form of reason that challenges traditional interpretations.

They pose a fundamental question: if the fruit of a same-sex relationship is Christ-like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and faithfulness—the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5—how can such a relationship be considered inherently sinful? This experiential evidence is for them a powerful indicator of the Spirit's work, calling for a re-examination of traditional interpretations. The witness of LGBTQ+ Christians who testify to God's blessing on their relationships and ministries is given significant weight in this discernment process.

**4.3 The Concept of "Analogous Relationships"** Some affirming theologians make a more nuanced argument from analogy. They contend that while the Bible does not explicitly describe or endorse committed same-sex partnerships, it does provide models for loving, covenantal relationships—most notably the marriage between a man and a woman. They argue that same-sex marriages can be understood as analogous to heterosexual marriages in

their capacity to embody the biblical values of love, fidelity, mutual sacrifice, and covenant commitment.

From this perspective, the essence of a Christian marriage is not gender complementarity but Christ-like, self-giving love (Ephesians 5). If a same-sex relationship can genuinely embody this kind of love, then it can be recognized as holy and God-honoring, even if it represents a new application of biblical principles. This approach attempts to remain biblically grounded while allowing for development in the church's understanding and application of Scripture. Change the numbering as appropriate.

**4.4 Post-Colonial Critique of the Conservative Stance** An intriguing critique from within post-colonial scholarship highlights a certain irony in the Church of Nigeria's position. While the church rightly asserts its independence from Western theological control, the particular form of biblical literalism it employs regarding sexuality was itself a product of the 19th-century missionary encounter. Victorian missionaries brought with them a specific, often prudish, interpretation of sexuality that was sometimes more restrictive than pre-colonial African sexual norms.

Scholars like Musa Dube and Justin Ukpong have noted that the intense focus on homosexuality as a defining moral issue represents a form of cultural captivity to Western agenda-setting, even if in opposition. The real moral crises facing Africa—poverty, corruption, tribalism, disease—can be overshadowed by a debate that originated in and continues to be driven by

Western cultural wars. This critique suggests that the Church of Nigeria's vehement opposition to homosexuality, while theologically grounded, also serves to reinforce its identity in opposition to the West, potentially at the expense of addressing more pressing local concerns.

The Nigerian Rebuttal: The Church of Nigeria finds these arguments fundamentally flawed and dangerous. It views the historical-critical method as a tool that undermines biblical authority by subjecting it to modern scholarly judgment. The "trajectory" argument is rejected as a pretext for disregarding clear commands, and the appeal to experience is seen as elevating human sentiment over divine revelation. The analogical approach is dismissed as a creative but unbiblical redefinition of marriage. For Nigerian Anglicans, this constellation of revisionist approaches represents the essence of the problem: the West has replaced the authority of Scripture with the authority of culture, and in so doing, has created a different gospel.

## **5. Socio-Cultural, Ethical, and Legal Implications**

The Church of Nigeria's stance is powerfully reinforced by, and in turn reinforces, the socio-cultural and legal context of Nigeria itself. This synergy creates a formidable bulwark against any internal or external pressure for change. The implications extend far beyond theology into the realms of law, politics, media, and the daily lives of Nigerians.

**5.1 Alignment with National Law and Cultural Norms** In 2014, Nigeria enacted the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (SSMPA), which

criminalizes same-sex marriage, civil unions, and even public displays of same-sex affection. The law also prohibits the registration of gay clubs, societies, and organizations, and their sustenance, meetings, and processions. The Church of Nigeria was a vocal and influential supporter of this legislation, submitting memoranda to the National Assembly and mobilizing its members in support of the bill.

This alignment creates a powerful fusion of religious and national identity. To be a "good Nigerian" and a "good Anglican" are seen as synonymous in their opposition to homosexuality (Okwuosa, 2022). This is further strengthened by traditional African cultural values that place a high premium on marriage, procreation, and the continuation of family lineages—values perceived to be directly threatened by homosexuality. The emphasis on community over individualism in African societies makes conformity to social norms a higher virtue than personal autonomy in sexual matters. As expressed by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo at a conference of African bishops, the practice is "un-biblical, unnatural and definitely un-African" (Gbesan, 2020). This trinity of objections—theological, natural, and cultural—forms a powerful discursive barrier against LGBTQ+ acceptance.

**5.2 Impact on LGBTQ+ Nigerians—Stigma and Vulnerability:** The combined effect of religious condemnation, cultural stigma, and legal criminalization creates an environment of extreme vulnerability for LGBTQ+ Nigerians. A 2019 report by Human Rights Watch documented widespread

violence, blackmail, extortion, discrimination in employment and housing, and arbitrary arrests targeting LGBTQ+ people. The SSMPA law has been used to justify mob violence and police brutality, creating a climate of fear that drives LGBTQ+ people underground.

The Church's call for "counselling and admonishing" occurs within this context of intense societal pressure, where the goal of such counselling is almost universally understood as change or celibacy, not affirmation. While church leaders may genuinely believe they are acting out of pastoral concern, their theological position, when combined with the legal and social context, contributes to the systemic oppression of a vulnerable population. This places the church in a complex pastoral dilemma, where its theological convictions, however sincerely held, have tangible consequences for the safety and well-being of sexual minorities.

**5.3 The Role of Media and Public Discourse** The Church of Nigeria has skillfully utilized both Christian and secular media to shape public discourse on homosexuality. The establishment of the Advent Cable Network Nigeria (ACNN) provides a dedicated platform for promoting the church's conservative perspective. Major events like the Divine Commonwealth Conference (DIVCCON) and the annual Joshua Generations youth gathering serve as powerful venues for reinforcing traditional teachings on sexuality to thousands of attendees.

In secular media, church leaders are frequently quoted condemning homosexuality in stark terms. Primate Nicholas Okoh's description of it as "great evils and works of the devil" and Primate Henry Ndukuba's characterization of it as a "deadly virus" that is "contagious" and "spreading" have framed the issue in public discourse as a matter of national security and spiritual warfare (Vanguard, 2021). This media strategy has been effective in solidifying public opinion and presenting the church's stance as the only authentically Christian and Nigerian position.

**5.4 The Economic Dimension:** Financial Independence and South-South Solidarity- The Church of Nigeria's financial independence is a crucial but often overlooked factor in its ability to defy Western pressure. Unlike some African churches that rely on funding from Western partners, the Church of Nigeria is largely self-supporting through the tithes and offerings of its growing membership. This financial autonomy frees it from the leverage that Western churches might otherwise exert through aid or development partnerships.

Furthermore, the church has become a patron itself, funding theological education, sponsoring bishops from poorer provinces to attend GAFCON, and supporting conservative movements in the West like ACNA. This reversal of financial flows represents a significant shift in global Christian dynamics. The economic rise of Nigeria, despite its fluctuations, has provided the material

base for this theological assertiveness, enabling the church to engage in costly global initiatives without Western backing.

**5.5 Interfaith and Ecumenical Dimensions-** The Anglican stance aligns closely with that of other major religious groups in Nigeria, creating a powerful unified front. The Catholic Church in Nigeria holds an equally conservative position on homosexuality, as do the various Pentecostal and Evangelical denominations. This interdenominational consensus extends to Nigeria's Muslim population, whose leaders have also strongly opposed LGBTQ+ rights.

This rare point of agreement between Christians and Muslims in a country often divided by religious conflict has made opposition to homosexuality a unifying national cause that transcends other sectarian divides. In the ecumenical and interfaith realm, it has created strange bedfellows, with conservative Anglicans finding more in common with conservative Catholics and Muslims on this issue than with their liberal Anglican counterparts in the West. This broad religious consensus makes political resistance to LGBTQ+ rights remarkably robust and insulated from international criticism.

**5.6 A Post-Colonial Assertion of Power** Ultimately, the Church of Nigeria's stance is a potent expression of post-colonial identity and agency. For centuries, Western powers dictated political, economic, and religious terms to Africa. The current conflict represents a dramatic reversal where the formerly colonized are now accusing the colonizers of theological and moral

bankruptcy. As Primate Akinola famously stated, "God has not created Christians in Africa as an imitation of any race" (Gbesan, 2020).

This struggle is not just about sexuality; it is about authority, legacy, and who gets to speak for the Anglican future. The Church of Nigeria, with its rapidly growing population, financial independence, and unwavering conviction, believes that future belongs to the Global South. Its stance on homosexuality has become the primary marker of its differentiation from what it perceives as a dying, compromised Western Christianity. In this light, the conflict is a definitive chapter in the larger story of the globalization of Christianity and the decentering of Western theological authority.

The Church of Nigeria frowned at and totally condemned the appointment of ‘pro-gay’ female Archbishop. In her statement in the Vanguard News, she states that Nigerian’s Anglican Church breaks from Canterbury over pro-gay female Archbishop. She has declared spiritual independence from the Church of England, rejecting the appointment of Bishop Sarah Mullally as the new Archbishop of Canterbury. The church said her support for same-sex marriage and her evaluation as the first female to hold the position signify a troubling moral decline within the leadership of the Anglican Communion. In a statement by the primate of the Church of Nigeria, The Most Reverend Henry Ndukuba, the church described the announcement made on Friday, 3 October 2025, as ‘devastating’ and ‘insensitive’, accusing the Church of England of

ignoring the deep division already facing the global Anglican community. This election is a double jeopardy (vanguard, 2025).

## **6. Conclusion**

The stance of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) on homosexuality and lesbianism is a defining feature of its identity and a watershed issue in contemporary global Christianity. This analysis has demonstrated that its position is an intricate tapestry woven from threads of conservative biblical hermeneutics, a historical narrative of self-assertion and growth, and a deep integration with Nigerian socio-cultural and legal norms. The church's journey from a mission field to a theological powerhouse has equipped it with the demographic strength, institutional confidence, and financial independence to challenge the historical centers of Anglican authority, leading to a fundamental realignment of the global Communion through the GAFCON movement. With the recent election of a female Archbishop of Canterbury, the chairman of GAFCON, the Most Rev Dr Laurent Mbanda, in a statement mentioned that “GAFCON has re-ordered the Anglican communion by restoring its original structure as a fellowship of autonomous provinces bound together by the formularies of reformation, as reflected at the first Lambeth conference in 1867, and we are now the Global Anglican Communion”.

The conflict is often superficially framed as a simple binary between progress and tradition. However, from the Nigerian perspective, it is a multifaceted struggle for the soul of Anglicanism—a defense of biblical authority against

cultural accommodation, a post-colonial assertion of the Global South's right to define its own theological destiny, and a pastoral commitment to what it believes is God's design for human flourishing. The Church of Nigeria's unwavering opposition is, therefore, unlikely to change, as it is underpinned by deep theological conviction, powerful cultural reinforcement, and a sense of divine calling to preserve what it sees as historic Christian faith.

The implications of this stance are profound and far-reaching. Within Nigeria, it reinforces legal and social structures that marginalize LGBTQ+ people, creating serious pastoral and ethical challenges. Within the Anglican Communion, it has irrevocably shattered the old center-periphery model, creating a polycentric global Christianity where theological alignment trumps geographical proximity or historical relationship. For the worldwide church, the Nigerian example demonstrates the rising influence of Global South Christianity, which is increasingly setting the agenda for theological and ethical debates.

Looking forward, the contours of the conflict suggest several possible futures. The "two-track" or "two-tier" communion envisioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury seems increasingly institutionalized, with GAFCON and the traditional Instruments of Communion operating as parallel structures. The Church of Nigeria will likely continue to invest in alternative Anglican networks like ACNA and the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches, further solidifying this realignment. The demographic tide, which strongly

favors the conservative Global South, suggests that the numerical and moral center of gravity in world Anglicanism will continue to shift away from the liberal West.

The Church of Nigeria's stance on homosexuality, therefore, is more than a single-issue position. It is a symbol of a larger transformation in world Christianity—a declaration that the future of the faith will be shaped not in the secularizing capitals of the West but in the vibrant, growing churches of the Global South. While this stance creates serious tensions and produces real human costs, it represents, from the Nigerian perspective, a necessary stand for truth in a world perceived as losing its moral and spiritual bearings. The enduring nature of this conflict suggests that it will remain a defining feature of Anglican identity and global Christian discourse for the foreseeable future.

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