SAME-SEX MARRIAGE (PROHIBITION) ACT (SSMPA) IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND MORAL REASONING

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Abstract

The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act (SSMPA) represents one of Nigeria's most significant legal interventions in the relationship between sexuality, morality, religion and public law. Enacted in 2013 and brought into force in January 2014, the legislation prohibits same-sex marriage and civil unions, prevents their solemnisation in places of worship, prohibits the registration and operation of gay clubs, societies and organisations, and criminalises certain forms of public expression and association. Its emergence and continuing social significance cannot, however, be understood through legal analysis alone. In Nigeria, Christian theological convictions concerning creation, marriage, sexuality, holiness and moral order significantly shape public discourse concerning same-sex relationships. This article critically examines the SSMPA through the lenses of Christian ethics and moral reasoning. It argues that Christian opposition to same-sex sexual relationships may be grounded in established theological and biblical convictions, but such convictions require careful distinction between moral judgment, criminalisation and the legitimate exercise of state power. The article contends that Christian moral condemnation of same-sex conduct cannot ethically become a justification for violence, humiliation, blackmail, extortion or extra-judicial punishment. Christian public theology must therefore hold together theological conviction, human dignity, justice, due process and the protection of vulnerable persons. The study concludes that a responsible Christian engagement with the SSMPA requires neither the abandonment of Christian sexual ethics nor the uncritical sacralisation of criminal law, but a critical theological examination of how religious moral convictions are translated into public legislation and lived social practice.

Keywords: Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, Christian ethics, moral reasoning, sexuality; Kito, human dignity, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Sexuality has become an increasingly contested subject within Nigerian public discourse. Few issues demonstrate the intersection of law, religion, morality and social identity more clearly than the country's legal and social treatment of same-sex relationships. The enactment of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act in 2013, subsequently commenced in January 2014, gave statutory expression to a particular understanding of marriage and sexuality within Nigerian law. The Act prohibits marriage contracts and civil unions between persons of the same sex, refuses legal recognition to such unions, prohibits their solemnisation in churches, mosques and other places of worship, and establishes offences relating to same-sex relationships, organisations and public displays of same-sex affection (UK Home Office, 2026). The legislation emerged within a social environment in which religious convictions exert considerable influence upon public morality. Christianity, particularly through churches, clergy, theological institutions and Christian political discourse, has played an important role in shaping Nigerian perceptions of marriage and sexual morality. Consequently, opposition to same-sex relationships is frequently articulated through Christian categories such as creation, natural order, holiness, sexual purity, marriage and biblical authority (Oguntola-Laguda & van Klinken, 2016; Ukah, 2018).

The relationship between these theological convictions and state legislation, however, requires critical examination. A theological judgment that a particular behaviour is sinful does not automatically answer the distinct legal question of whether that behaviour should be criminalised. The distinction between sin and crime, while not absolute, is ethically significant. Christian moral theology concerns the formation of persons and communities according to particular understandings of the good, whereas criminal law exercises coercive authority over an entire population.

The issue becomes more complex when the social consequences of anti-same-sex moral discourse are considered. In Nigeria, the phenomenon popularly known as Kito has become associated with the targeting of persons perceived to be gay, often through online entrapment followed by assault, blackmail, extortion and humiliation. TIER documented 84 Kito incidents in 2024, while the European Union Agency for Asylum notes that the actual number is likely higher because many victims do not report such incidents (European Union Agency for Asylum [EUAA], 2025; The Initiative for Equal Rights [TIER], 2025). Ufere's (2026) study, *Kito and the Scourge of Jungle*

Justice against "Suspected" Gay People in Nigeria: An Ethical Analysis, provides an important foundation for this dimension of the discussion. Ufere argues that Kito, although sometimes framed as moral enforcement, has developed into organised abuse involving entrapment, assault, extortion and, in extreme cases, death. His analysis presents Kito as a breakdown of law, social order and ethical reasoning rather than legitimate moral discipline.

This article therefore places the SSMPA within a broader theological and ethical conversation. It does not begin from the assumption that Christian sexual ethics and the SSMPA are necessarily identical, nor does it assume that every Christian must reach the same conclusion concerning the legislation. Instead, it examines how Christian ethics and moral reasoning can critically engage the law while addressing the concrete social realities that emerge within its wider environment. The central argument is that Christian moral opposition to same-sex sexual relationships does not logically or ethically entail support for violence, vigilantism, extortion or the denial of human dignity. At the same time, criticism of the SSMPA should not be based upon a caricature of Christian sexual ethics.

2. The SSMPA in the Nigerian Legal Context

The formal title of the legislation is the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2013. The Act was enacted by the National Assembly and commenced on 7 January 2014. Its provisions extend beyond the recognition of marriage. Section 1 prohibits same-sex marriage contracts and civil unions and denies them the legal benefits of valid marriage. Section 2 prohibits their solemnisation in churches, mosques and other places of worship. Section 3 specifies that only marriage contracted between a man and a woman shall be recognised as valid in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). Section 4 expands the scope of the legislation further by prohibiting the registration of gay clubs, societies and organisations, as well as their sustenance, processions and meetings. It also prohibits public displays of same-sex amorous relationships. Section 5 provides criminal penalties for specified offences under the Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

The breadth of these provisions is significant for theological analysis. The law does not merely determine whether a same-sex couple can obtain legal recognition for a marriage. It also enters areas involving religious institutions, associations, public expression and social organisation. The reference to churches and other places of worship establishes a direct relationship between state

regulation and institutional religious practice. The SSMPA should nevertheless not be treated as synonymous with the entirety of Nigerian law concerning same-sex sexual conduct. Other legislation, including provisions of the Criminal Code and Penal Code, also regulates certain same-sex sexual acts. In twelve northern states, Sharia-based criminal provisions applicable to Muslims impose additional restrictions and penalties (UK Home Office, 2026).

3. Literature Review

Scholarship on Nigeria's SSMPA has developed across law, religion, human rights, sociology, public health and African studies. The literature demonstrates that the SSMPA cannot adequately be understood as legislation concerned only with the legal status of marriage. It represents a point at which competing conceptions of morality, citizenship, religion, sexuality, human rights and national identity intersect. The literature is useful for establishing the legal and social context of this study, but it also reveals a relative separation between legal analysis of the SSMPA and theological analysis of the moral reasoning through which the law is defended, contested and socially interpreted. Legal scholarship has focused on the scope, constitutionality and human-rights implications of the SSMPA. Oladosu-Uthman (2021), examining the legislation within changing understandings of marriage in Nigeria and Africa, argues that the Act has generated human-rights implications for persons involved in same-sex relationships. Solomon (2023), using proportionality analysis, argues that aspects of the Act raise serious questions concerning constitutional and African Charter rights, including human dignity and non-discrimination. These studies establish that the legal debate concerns more than marriage recognition; it also involves the limits of state power and the protection of fundamental rights.

A contrasting legal-cultural approach appears in Chukwu (2018), who situates the SSMPA within Nigerian cultural, religious and pre-existing legal frameworks and argues that it is consistent with prevailing Nigerian moral and religious understandings of marriage. This position is important for the present study because it demonstrates that the legal debate is not simply law against morality. Rather, it involves competing understandings of morality, culture, rights, religion and the proper purposes of law. A second body of scholarship examines religion and the politics of same-sex relationships. Oguntola-Laguda and van Klinken (2016) examine Nigerian Christian and Muslim responses to the SSMPA and show how opposition to same-sex relationships became a significant

point of religious and political convergence. Their work demonstrates that the Act cannot be separated from the religious environment in which it emerged and was publicly defended.

Ukah (2018) examines Pentecostal discourse concerning same-sex relations in Nigeria and highlights the role of prominent Christian leaders in shaping public understandings of homosexuality. He shows how same-sex relations may become associated with national identity, religious authenticity, social order and contested citizenship. Ukah (2021) further examines Pentecostal discourse through the related questions of religious expression and hate speech, drawing attention to the difficult boundary between religious freedom and discourse that may contribute to hostility or exclusion.

Human-rights scholarship and documentation add another dimension. Human Rights Watch (2016), following interviews with 73 Nigerians who identified as LGBT and representatives of 15 Nigerian organisations, documented reports of violence, arbitrary arrests, detention, extortion, privacy violations and other abuses following the enactment of the SSMPA. The report argued that the Act contributed to an environment of fear and self-censorship and that some abuses were facilitated by police or members of the public. Recent public-health scholarship reinforces the significance of these consequences. A 2026 scoping review identified stigma and discrimination, multiple forms of violence, difficulties in accessing healthcare with dignity, and significant health disparities among LGBTQ+ Nigerians as recurring themes in the literature (Health and Social Consequences of the Same-Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, 2026). The review also identified a disproportionate focus on gay and bisexual men and men who have sex with men, suggesting the need for broader research across sexual and gender minorities.

The literature on Kito provides a further dimension that has not been sufficiently integrated into theological discussions of the SSMPA. Kito describes patterns of entrapment and targeted abuse in which individuals perceived to be gay may be lured through online platforms and subsequently subjected to assault, extortion, blackmail and humiliation. Ufere (2026) examines Kito explicitly through an ethical framework and argues that its characterisation as moral enforcement is deeply problematic. His analysis presents Kito as a manifestation of jungle justice and a breakdown of ethical and legal reasoning rather than legitimate moral correction. Ufere's contribution is particularly significant for the present study because it introduces a question that is not sufficiently developed in the existing literature: what happens when moral judgments concerning same-sex

sexuality are detached from the ethical constraints of justice, human dignity and lawful process? His analysis provides a conceptual bridge between the formal legal regulation of same-sex relationships and the informal social enforcement of sexual norms. The present study builds upon that insight but moves in a different direction. Whereas Ufere's study primarily analyses Kito as an ethical problem of jungle justice, this article examines how Christian moral reasoning should respond to the relationship between sexuality, law and the social consequences of moral condemnation.

The existing literature consequently reveals both substantial scholarship and a discernible gap. Legal scholars have examined the SSMPA in relation to constitutional and human-rights principles; religious studies scholars have examined Christian and Muslim responses; Pentecostal studies have analysed religious rhetoric; and human-rights and public-health researchers have documented social consequences. Fewer studies, however, bring these dimensions together within a specifically Christian ethical and public-theological framework. The present study addresses this gap by examining how Christian moral reasoning understands same-sex sexuality, how such reasoning relates to state criminalisation, and how Christian ethics should respond when moral discourse is associated with violence, particularly through Kito. The contribution of this study therefore lies not in determining whether Christianity should affirm or reject same-sex sexual relationships. Rather, it critically investigates the ethical relationship between Christian conviction, state coercion and the treatment of persons. This approach allows the SSMPA to be examined not simply as a legal instrument but as a theological and ethical test of how Christian moral convictions function within a pluralistic society.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework consisting of Christian virtue ethics, public theology and human dignity, with critical attention to the distinction between moral normativity and legal coercion. The combination is appropriate because the research is concerned simultaneously with moral character, the public application of theological convictions and the treatment of persons within a legal order.

4.1 Christian Virtue Ethics

Christian virtue ethics provides the primary ethical lens for evaluating Christian responses to sexuality, law and Kito. Unlike an exclusively rule-based approach, virtue ethics asks not only whether an action conforms to a rule but also what kind of person or community is formed through particular patterns of conduct. Christian virtue ethics is concerned with dispositions such as love, justice, compassion, courage, temperance and practical wisdom. Hauerwas (1981) argues that Christian ethics is fundamentally concerned with the formation of a distinctive community whose practices embody the Christian story. Stassen and Gushee (2003) similarly emphasise moral transformation and the formation of Christian character rather than reducing Christian ethics to isolated prohibitions. This framework is particularly useful for evaluating Kito. If a person claims to be acting in defence of moral values but employs deception, violence, extortion or humiliation, virtue ethics asks whether such conduct exhibits Christian virtues. Justice cannot be separated from truthfulness, and moral concern cannot be separated from love of neighbour. The alleged immorality of another person's conduct cannot transform vice into virtue in the person who responds violently. Christian virtue ethics therefore enables the study to distinguish the moral evaluation of conduct from the ethical evaluation of the means used against a person associated with that conduct.

4.2 Public Theology

The second component is public theology. Public theology provides a conceptual basis for examining how Christian convictions enter debates concerning law, politics, citizenship and social morality. It is particularly appropriate to Nigeria because Christianity occupies a visible position within public life and has contributed substantially to debates concerning morality and governance. Smit (2013) describes public theology as theological reflection concerned with the public implications of Christian faith, while Stackhouse (2007) emphasises theology's responsibility to engage questions of public life and social ethics. The relevance of public theology to the SSMPA is clear. Nigerian Christians have participated actively in public debates about same-sex relationships, and Christian leaders have advocated legal restrictions on theological and moral grounds. Oguntola-Laguda and van Klinken (2016) demonstrate the importance of religious responses in the discourse surrounding the SSMPA, while Ukah (2018, 2021) demonstrates how

Pentecostal discourse has contributed to the construction of homosexuality as a significant public and political issue.

Public theology therefore provides the framework for asking: When Christian moral convictions enter legislation, what theological and ethical responsibilities accompany the exercise of public influence? The framework does not require Christianity to withdraw from public discourse. Rather, it requires theological arguments to be publicly accountable. Christian claims concerning sexuality must therefore be considered alongside justice, human dignity, the common good and the consequences of legal coercion.

4.3 Human Dignity and the Imago Dei

The third component is the theological concept of human dignity, grounded particularly in the biblical doctrine of the imago Dei. Genesis 1:26-27 describes human beings as created in the image and likeness of God. Within Christian theological anthropology, this establishes a fundamental account of human worth that precedes social status, economic usefulness and political recognition. The imago Dei should not be interpreted as a declaration that every human action is morally permissible. Rather, it establishes a distinction between the value of the person and the moral evaluation of conduct. This distinction is crucial because debates concerning homosexuality can collapse the two. A Christian may regard same-sex sexual conduct as contrary to a particular interpretation of biblical sexual ethics while still recognising the person involved as a bearer of God's image.

This theological principle provides a direct basis for the critique of Kito. If every human being bears the divine image, then deliberate humiliation or physical abuse of a person suspected of being gay constitutes a serious ethical violation. The victim does not lose human dignity because of another person's moral judgment concerning the victim's sexuality. Solomon (2023) similarly identifies human dignity and non-discrimination as central concerns in evaluating the SSMPA in relation to Nigerian constitutional and African Charter rights.

4.4 Moral Wrong and Criminal Wrong

A fourth analytical principle is the distinction between moral wrong and criminal wrong. This is not treated as a separate ethical theory but as a critical principle through which the relationship between Christian ethics and legislation is examined. Christianity recognises categories of sin that

are broader than criminal law. Consequently, the assertion that an action is sinful does not by itself establish that the action should be criminalized. The distinction matters because criminal law possesses coercive power. It can result in arrest, detention, prosecution and imprisonment. Criminalisation therefore requires justification beyond the assertion that a religious community regards conduct as immoral. Christians may argue that marriage has a particular nature and that the state should preserve that institution, but the ethical argument must also address the scope and consequences of criminalisation. This principle clarifies the relationship between the SSMPA and Kito. Even where conduct is prohibited by law, the law does not transfer judicial authority to private citizens. Kito cannot therefore be defended as an extension of the SSMPA. Private violence is not criminal justice. It bypasses the procedures through which guilt is established and punishment lawfully imposed.

4.5 Integrated Analytical Model

The four dimensions of the framework can be integrated into a single analytical model: Christian theological conviction → moral reasoning → public theological engagement → legal and social consequences → ethical evaluation. The first stage concerns Christian understandings of sexuality and marriage. The second examines the moral reasoning through which those teachings are defended. The third considers how such reasoning enters public discourse and influences legislation. The fourth investigates the consequences of that public and legal environment, including stigma, violence and Kito. The final stage subjects the process to ethical evaluation through justice, love, truthfulness, human dignity, proportionality and respect for lawful process. This model prevents the study from making the simplistic claim that Christianity caused the SSMPA or that the SSMPA directly caused Kito. Instead, it examines the relationship among moral discourse, institutional power and social consequence. This is methodologically more defensible and theologically more productive. It also permits a critical assessment of Christianity from within its own moral resources: if Christian ethics claims to promote holiness, justice, love and human flourishing, Christian participation in public law should be assessed according to those same values. The theoretical framework therefore establishes the central proposition of this study: Christian ethical fidelity requires both moral conviction and moral restraint. Christian ethics may maintain substantive judgments concerning sexual morality while simultaneously rejecting violence, vigilantism, humiliation and the dehumanisation of persons. Public theology, in turn,

requires Christians to consider not only whether a law reflects their moral convictions but also whether the exercise of coercive legal power serves justice and the common good.

5. Christianity, Sexuality and Moral Reasoning

Christian sexual ethics has historically developed around theological claims concerning creation, human embodiment, marriage, covenant, procreation, holiness and human flourishing. Within traditional Christian theology, sexual intimacy is ordinarily understood as belonging within marriage, while marriage itself is understood as a covenantal relationship between man and woman. This theological position has shaped much Nigerian Christian discourse concerning same-sex relationships. Biblical appeals commonly include Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 2:18-25, Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The use of these texts, however, requires hermeneutical care. Biblical texts are situated within particular literary, historical and theological contexts. Contemporary application therefore involves interpretation, theological reasoning and ethical judgment. The presence of a prohibition in a biblical text does not, without additional argument, determine the appropriate form of modern criminal legislation.

Christian moral reasoning should therefore resist a simplistic movement from biblical prohibition to criminal sanction. The Church can teach that conduct is sinful while engaging critically with whether criminal punishment is appropriate. Such a distinction does not necessarily weaken Christian conviction; it recognises the difference between ecclesial moral formation and state coercion. The question for public theology is therefore not whether Christianity should participate in public moral reasoning. It should. The question is how Christian moral reasoning should participate responsibly in the formation and critique of public law within a plural society.

6. Christian Engagement with the SSMPA

Christian opposition to same-sex marriage can be defended within traditional Christian sexual ethics. From this perspective, the SSMPA may be interpreted as protecting a conception of marriage consistent with Christian understandings of a male-female covenantal institution. There is therefore a legitimate theological basis for Christians to oppose legal recognition of same-sex marriage. The ethical question changes, however, when the discussion moves from marriage to criminalisation. The Church's authority to teach its doctrine of marriage is not identical to the state's authority to impose criminal sanctions. Christian public theology must therefore ask

whether criminal law is the appropriate instrument for preserving every moral conviction held by the Church. This becomes particularly important where the law has consequences beyond marriage itself. The SSMPA's provisions concerning associations, meetings and public displays broaden the legal debate. The law's breadth makes it necessary to evaluate not only its moral objectives but also its institutional and social consequences.

A mature Christian ethical assessment should ask: What is the purpose of criminal law? What conduct properly belongs within its coercive reach? How should proportionality be evaluated? How should the state protect persons from violence while maintaining laws regulating conduct? And what happens when moral language is appropriated by private actors to justify violence? These questions do not require Christianity to surrender its sexual ethics. They require Christianity to distinguish moral formation from coercive enforcement.

7. Kito, Violence and the Failure of Moral Reasoning

Kito commonly involves perpetrators establishing contact with a person through social media or dating applications, arranging a meeting, and subsequently assaulting, humiliating, extorting or blackmailing the victim. Some perpetrators record abuse and threaten to distribute the material publicly. The EUAA (2025) identifies Kito as a recurring form of violence against LGBTIQ persons in Nigeria and reports that TIER documented 84 incidents in 2024. TIER's (2025) reporting identifies Kito as one of the recurring forms of human-rights violation perpetrated by non-state actors against LGBTQIA+ people. Its report describes cases involving entrapment, assault, blackmail and extortion and also documents allegations involving state actors and the misapplication of the SSMPA. These reports require careful interpretation because under-reporting, fear of disclosure and differences in reporting practices make precise prevalence difficult to establish. Ufere's (2026) analysis is particularly relevant because it shifts the ethical question from the abstract issue of whether same-sex conduct is morally permissible to the concrete question of how people perceived to violate prevailing sexual norms are treated. His argument that Kito is not moral discipline but jungle justice provides a basis for a Christian ethical critique of private violence.

The relationship between the SSMPA and Kito should nevertheless not be reduced to a direct causal claim. Kito is perpetrated by private individuals and groups for varying ideological and economic reasons. The existence of the SSMPA does not legally authorise private violence.

Nevertheless, legal and social environments can affect whether victims feel able to report abuse and whether perpetrators perceive victims as vulnerable. Human Rights Watch (2016) documented a climate of fear and reported cases of arbitrary arrests, detention and extortion following the enactment of the Act. The theological significance is considerable. If Christianity is invoked to defend moral order, it must also condemn the use of violence in the name of that order. Moral disagreement cannot become a licence for moral lawlessness. A person who deceives another in order to assault and extort him is not exercising Christian moral discipline. Such conduct violates justice, truthfulness and neighbour-love regardless of the victim's sexuality.

8. From Moral Condemnation to Criminalisation

One of the central ethical problems surrounding the SSMPA is the transition from moral judgment to criminal punishment. Christianity possesses legitimate authority to teach its adherents what it considers morally appropriate. The state, however, exercises coercive authority over citizens regardless of their religious convictions. Not every action regarded as sinful by Christianity is criminalised by Nigerian law. Christian ethics condemns numerous behaviours, including hatred, greed, envy and dishonesty, yet these are not automatically criminalised in every manifestation. The existence of a moral prohibition therefore does not by itself establish the necessity of criminal prohibition.

A Christian contribution to public morality should therefore involve reasoned engagement with justice and the common good. Christians may argue that marriage has a particular nature and that the state should preserve that institution, but the argument must also address the consequences of criminalisation for rights, dignity and social relations. This distinction also prevents a category error in relation to Kito. Even where conduct is prohibited by law, private citizens possess no authority to impose punishment. Kito is therefore not an acceptable extension of the law but a form of criminal conduct in its own right.

9. Human Dignity and the Imago Dei

Christian theological anthropology provides an important basis for addressing this problem. Genesis 1:26-27 locates human dignity within the divine image. The theological significance of the imago Dei is that human worth is grounded fundamentally in God's creative act rather than in

social approval, sexual identity, economic usefulness or political recognition. The imago Dei does not require Christian theology to declare every human action morally acceptable. It does require Christians to distinguish between judging conduct and degrading persons. A person does not cease to possess dignity because another person regards his or her conduct as sinful. This distinction is indispensable in relation to Kito. A person suspected of being gay does not thereby cease to be a human being deserving protection from assault, humiliation and exploitation. Even within a theological framework that regards same-sex sexual conduct as sinful, the person remains a bearer of God's image. This theological account also provides a constructive point of dialogue with human-rights discourse. Solomon (2023) identifies dignity and non-discrimination as central issues in evaluating the SSMPA. Although theological dignity and legal rights are conceptually distinct, their intersection creates an important space for Christian engagement with questions of justice.

10. Public Theology and the Limits of Religious Morality in Law

Public theology provides a useful framework for examining how Christian convictions enter debates concerning law, politics, citizenship and social morality. Nigeria is religiously plural, and Christian public theology must negotiate its contribution within a society shaped by Christianity, Islam, African religious traditions and secular legal institutions. The Church has a legitimate public voice. It can speak about justice, marriage, family, sexuality, human dignity, violence and the common good. It can participate in legislative debate and challenge policies it regards as unjust. However, public theological participation should not be confused with ecclesial control of the state.

The ethical adequacy of the SSMPA must therefore be evaluated through more than theological conviction. Questions of proportionality, justice, human dignity, due process and protection from violence remain relevant. A law can be supported by sincere religious conviction and still remain open to critical theological examination. This approach protects Christianity from the temptation to equate its moral theology with criminal law. The Christian contribution to public life is strongest when it can articulate its convictions while recognising the plural character of the political community.

11. Toward a Responsible Christian Moral Framework

A responsible Christian approach to the SSMPA and same-sex relationships in Nigeria should preserve several distinctions. First, Christian moral conviction should be distinguished from hatred of persons. A theological judgment concerning sexual conduct does not justify contempt for individuals. Second, moral teaching should be distinguished from criminal punishment. The Church has theological and pastoral means of moral formation that differ from the coercive powers of the state. Third, lawful enforcement should be distinguished from vigilantism. The existence of the SSMPA does not grant private citizens authority to assault or punish suspected offenders. Fourth, sexual ethics should be distinguished from social violence. Kito cannot be treated as an acceptable consequence of Christian sexual morality. Fifth, Christian public theology should distinguish conviction from coercion. Christians can participate vigorously in public debate while recognising the plural character of Nigerian society. These distinctions do not resolve every controversy surrounding the SSMPA. They establish, however, a more intellectually responsible framework for theological engagement. They allow Christian ethics to remain substantively moral without becoming a justification for dehumanisation or private violence.

12. Conclusion

The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act represents a significant intersection of Nigerian law, Christian morality and public theology. Its provisions extend beyond legal recognition of marriage to civil unions, places of worship, organisations and public displays of same-sex affection. The legislation therefore provides an important case through which the relationship between religious morality and state coercion can be examined. Christian theology has substantive grounds for maintaining a particular sexual ethic. Biblical texts concerning creation, marriage and sexual conduct remain important sources for Christian moral reflection. Yet the existence of a Christian moral prohibition does not by itself settle the question of criminalisation. The transition from theological judgment to state coercion requires further ethical reasoning concerning justice, proportionality, dignity and the common good. Kito makes this distinction especially urgent. Available evidence documents Kito as a recurring pattern of entrapment, assault, blackmail and extortion directed primarily at people perceived to be gay (EUAA, 2025; TIER, 2025). Ufere's (2026) ethical analysis contributes significantly by identifying Kito as a form of jungle justice and a breakdown of ethical and legal reasoning rather than legitimate moral discipline. The theological

implication is clear: Christian moral opposition to same-sex sexual relationships cannot provide ethical justification for Kito, vigilantism, assault, extortion or humiliation. Christian ethics must be capable of condemning conduct it regards as sinful while affirming the dignity and safety of persons who commit, or are suspected of committing, that conduct.

The deeper question is therefore how Christian morality should relate to criminal law in a religiously plural society. Christians have the right and responsibility to participate in public moral reasoning. Nevertheless, public theology requires critical examination of how religious convictions are translated into coercive legislation. The state is not the Church, and criminal law is not identical with Christian moral theology. The Christian ethical task is consequently twofold. It must remain faithful to its theological convictions concerning sexuality while refusing every form of violence and dehumanisation directed at persons on account of perceived sexual identity or conduct. The rejection of Kito is not a concession to moral relativism. It is an affirmation that moral conviction itself must remain subject to justice. The question is not simply whether Nigeria should regulate same-sex relationships. The deeper theological question is what kind of moral society Christianity seeks to help construct. If Christian ethics is concerned with moral order, that order must include justice for the vulnerable, protection from violence, respect for lawful process and recognition of human dignity. A Christian engagement with the SSMPA must therefore be sufficiently rigorous to defend its moral convictions and sufficiently self-critical to ensure that those convictions do not become instruments of oppression.

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