

Μαλακοί (Effeminates) and Ἀρσενοκοῖται (Homosexuals): A Reflection on 1 Corinthians 6:9 from a Ghanaian (Akan) Perspective



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ABSTRACT

Homosexuality and the rights of LGBTQ+ people have in recent times become one of the most discussed topics. In Ghana especially, there are massive debates, comments and advocacy of various kinds on the print, mass and electronic media on the subject. Politicians, religious leaders, among others have had to add their voice to the ongoing discussion as to whether or not to accept homosexuality. It appears the majority of Ghanaians are anti-gay and believe that the activities of homosexuals or LGBTQ+ people are unnatural and foreign to Ghanaian primal thought and thus are calling for proper human sexual rights and Ghanaian family values. This paper examines Paul's use of μαλακοί (effeminates) and ἄρσενοκοῖται (homosexuals) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 from the perspective of the Ghanaian (Akan) culture. The researcher brings out Paul's understanding and theology of μαλακοί and ἄρσενοκοῖται, and then engages these with the Akan understanding of homosexuality. This way, the Akan culture is factored into the interpretation of the selected Pauline passage as it forms the basis of the researcher's theological reflection on the subject under discussion among the Akan. The researcher uses Kwame Bediako's "scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition" as an interpretive tool, to interpret the Akan philosophy on homosexuality and how that compares to Paul's concept of homosexuality. This study serves as a contribution to knowledge as it brings new insights to the ongoing discussion throughout the world regarding the understanding of human sexuality especially from cultural and biblical perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Generally, the Ghanaian society appears to look at sexual matters with great concern. The Ghanaian is aware that sex has religious and moral importance and has always believed in 'sexual purity' but this position seems to be one that is being challenged by a section of people who are campaigning for homosexual freedom in Ghana. It is not in doubt that documentaries and news coming from most parts of the developed nations

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which seek to portray the open acceptance of homosexuality pose a great challenge to the modern Ghanaian.¹ An Ambassador of the United States to Ghana, Robert P. Jackson, in 2018 described Ghanaians who oppose homosexual rights as being myopic and intolerant. He stated,

This is a long process and it was a long process in my country. Homosexual marriage has only become law in recent years and prior to that when I was growing up, nobody talked about homosexuality. Everyone who was gay suffered enormous discrimination and that has changed in the United States because people have a better understanding of the science and issues. I think that as Ghanaians gain a greater understanding of the science and issues, they will also be very tolerant because this is a very tolerant country and this is one area where Ghana's tolerance seems very limited.²

The implication of this is that Ghana is being coaxed by one of its major international donor partners to accept or legalize homosexual activities in Ghana. Similarly, President John Evans Atta Mills, in 2011 rejected the call from the Prime Minister of Britain to legalize homosexual activities in Ghana. Mills contended that, No one can deny Prime Minister Cameron his right to make policies, take initiatives or make statements that reflect his societal norms and ideals. But, he does not have the right to direct other sovereign nations as to what they should do, especially where their societal norms and ideals are different from those which exist in Prime Minister Cameron's society. I, as president of this nation, will never initiate or support any attempt to legalize homosexuality in Ghana...³

By Mills' statement, Ghana will never be ready to accept the imposition of homosexual activities because they are inconsistent with the moral values of Ghanaians. One needs to however appreciate that Mills' comment was in response to a threat by the British Prime Minister to cut aid to African countries with anti-gay legislation. There may be serious economic challenges with Mills' position but it is clear that he was willing to protect the moral sanctity of Ghanaians at the expense of economic favours. Largely, in Ghana's bid to grow as a nation, she is confronted with difficulties which may compel her to discard its traditional ethics and embrace a foreign culture which is at variance with her own. This is one of the threats that globalization or modernity seems to pose to the moral advancement of the Ghanaian society which of course includes the Akan people.

Human rights campaigners are globally pushing for the acceptance of homosexuality. Deborah P. Amory argues that, "a growing number of organizations are forming in Africa and other countries that are proudly named gay and lesbian. These organizations draw on a developing human rights discourse that identifies lesbian and gay rights as human rights."⁴ She further suggests that,

In 1991, for example, Amnesty International recognized persecution on the basis of sexual orientation as a human rights issue, and sexual orientation has recently become grounds for political asylum applications in the United States. Issues of sexuality, human rights, and "sexual rights," were hotly debated in Beijing at the Fourth World Conference on Women. And the incorporation of sexual orientation into the South African 1996 constitution has also broadened debates to include constitutional law. New information technologies, particularly the internet, are playing an important role in these developments.⁵

¹ Stonewall Staff, "10 Documentaries to Understand the LGBTQ+ Rights Movement", accessed on 8th December 2021, from www.stonewall.org.uk; See also, "40 Essential LGBTQ+ Documentaries", accessed on 8th December 2021, from <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com>; Rachele Greenspan, "8 LGBTQ Documentaries to Watch During the Pride Month" (2019), accessed on 8th December, 2021, from <https://time.com/5589725/best-lgbtq-documentaries/>; Jasmine Ting, "15 LGBTQ+ Documentaries that Everybody Needs to Watch", accessed on 8th December, 2021, from <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/movies/g37828238/best-lgbt-documentaries/>

² Robert P. Jackson (US, Ambassador), "There are Far more Gays in Ghana than Ghanaians Realize", Accessed on 12th March 2018, <https://ghanavibes.com/hope-ghana-can-accept-homosexuality-next-10-years-us-ambassador/>.

³ "Answers on Homosexuality – Late Evans Atta Mills Vs. Akuffo Addo", Published by Eye Ghana TV, Accessed on 26th November 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bPxU9FvWwU.

⁴ Deborah P. Amory, "Homosexuality' in Africa: Issues and Debates", *African Issues*, 25 no.1, (1997), 5-10 (8). Published online: 06th May, 2016, Accessed on 20th March 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1548450500005217>

⁵ Amory, "Homosexuality' in Africa: Issues and Debates", 8.

On both the global and African stage, there are efforts aimed at pushing the agenda on homosexuality. Examples such as the Gays and Lesbians in African Studies (GLAS), International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), or International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) can be mentioned.⁶ But presently in Ghana, the campaign for homosexual rights seems to have encountered opposition. There is therefore the need to look at the issue from both biblical and Ghanaian cultural perspectives. This is so important because today there appears to be a universal language for articulating human sexualities such as homosexuality. However, as Eric Nii Bortey Anum explains, different cultural and social groups “have different ways of coding and expressing sexuality. When it comes to rights and rites related to sexuality..., there exist cultural relativism based on particular moral codes, world view and legal restrictions that are considered by societies in dealing with it and communicating it.”⁷ What Anum is saying is that the Ghanaian disposition towards the acceptance of homosexuality must be guided by the “moral codes” of its culture. It is worth noting that with an almost 70% Christian population, Ghanaian culture today can be said to be heavily influenced by Ghanaian Christianity – a unique blend of biblical Christianity rooted in the primal consciousness of the Ghanaian.

The main thrust of this paper is to examine Paul’s use of *μαλακοι* (effeminate) and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* (homosexuals) in 1 Corinthians 6:9 from the perspective of the Ghanaian (Akan) culture. The researcher intends to bring out Paul’s understanding and theology of *μαλακοι* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται*, and then engage these with the Akan understanding of homosexuality. This way, the Akan culture is factored into the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:9 as it forms the basis of the researcher’s theological reflection on the subject under discussion among the Akan. The researcher uses Kwame Bediako’s position of “scripture as the hermeneutic of culture and tradition”⁸ as an interpretive tool, to interpret the Akan philosophy on homosexuality and how that compares to Paul’s concept of human sexuality.

ΜΑΛΑΚΟΙ AND ΑΨΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ IN 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, discusses the different categories of sinners which he describes as the “unrighteous”, in Greek ἄδικοι. David E. Garland refers to the ἄδικοι as, “Those who are estranged from God and do not know the will of God...”⁹ Again, Gordon Fee has argued that Paul regularly uses ἄδικοι to refer to those who break God’s law, and hence the direct meaning will be the wicked or “‘ungodly,’ or ‘unrighteousness’”.¹⁰ In other words, ἄδικοι describes those who are unjustified before God as against justified believers. To be sure the Corinthians understand who the unrighteous are, he goes on to be more specific in mentioning the sexually immoral persons or fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers. As the title of this paper indicates, the focus will be on the *μαλακοι* (effeminate) and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* (homosexuals).

Μαλακοι (Effeminate)

Μαλακοι is a loan word from the Latin *mallus*, meaning “soft” and it is mostly used in Greek literature to refer to “effeminate” as translated in verse 9 in some versions of the Bible.¹¹ The use of *μαλακοι* by Paul in 1 Corinthians has generated a number of debates among biblical scholars as to what it really means. For instance, some have argued that, *μαλακοι* refers to those males who are penetrated sexually by their fellow male partners. David F. Wright explains that *μαλακοι* “may well be those who allowed themselves to be misused, rather than those who took the initiative, in a male homosexual act.”¹² John R. Jones gleaning from Christian literature by Polycarp on 1 Corinthians 6 indicates that the term was used to describe an undeserving

⁶ Amory, “Homosexuality’ in Africa: Issues and Debates”, 10.

⁷ Eric Nii Bortey Anum, “The Body Matters: Rights and Rites of African Sexualities and the Body in the context of 1 Cor. 6”, *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, 1 no. 8 (2014): 92-93.

⁸ Kwame Bediako, “Scripture as the Hermeneutic of Culture and Tradition”, *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (June 2001).

⁹ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), 195-196.

¹⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2014), 255.

¹¹ Ian Paul, *Same-Sex Unions: The Key Biblical Texts*, (Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd. 2014), 26.

¹² David F. Wright, “Homosexuality”, in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 414.

person and could simply have been seen as effeminate.¹³ Also, Jones admits, “None of this, of course, negates the possibility that the term *malakos* included male homosexual behavior.”¹⁴ Similarly, Fee has suggested that,

The first word, *malakoi*, has the basic meaning of “soft”; but it also became a pejorative epithet for men who were “soft” or “effeminate,” most likely referring to the younger, “passive” partner in a pederastic relationship – the most common form of homosexuality in the Greco-Roman world. In many instances, young men sold themselves as “mistresses” for the sexual pleasure of men older than themselves. The problem is that there was a technical word for such men, and *malakos* is seldom, if ever, so used. Since it is not the ordinary word for such homosexual behavior, one cannot be sure what it means in a list like this, where there is no further context to help. What is certain is that it refers to *behavior* of some kind, not simply to an attitude or characteristics.¹⁵

It is clear that Fee is not too sure about the exact meaning Paul intends to communicate with the word *μαλακοι*. But his insistence that the term describes a “*behavior* of some kind, not simply to an attitude or characteristics” seems to agree with William E. Vine’s understanding of Paul’s usage. Vine argues that the word, does not only refer to “a male who practices forms of lewdness, but persons in general, who are guilty of addiction to sins of the flesh...”¹⁶ In Vine’s submission, *μαλακοι* can be applied to either males or females who are addicted to the “sins of the flesh.” Though it is difficult to tell at this point what the sins of the flesh are, Paul may be speaking against indulgence in bodily pleasures such as illicit sex, drugs, alcohol *et cetera*. It can be concluded that, even though, the meaning of *μαλακοι* cannot be easily ascertained. The way Paul presents his list of sexual sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9 leads one to say that, *μαλακοι* may speak to either male or female homosexuality (gayness or lesbianism).

Ἄρσενοκοῖται (Homosexuals)

The term ἄρσενοκοῖται which comes after *μαλακοι* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 is a compound word derived from ἄρσεν (‘‘male – as stronger for *lifting*’’) and κοίτην (‘‘coitus’’).¹⁸ Whenever, ἄρσενος or ἄρσεν is used, the emphasis seems to be placed on two things, namely, the sexuality and the physical strength¹⁹ of the male figure. This connotation easily helps to differentiate a male from a female who may be denoted by the word θήλυς.²⁰ Again, the translators of the LXX used ἄρσεν to translate the Hebrew *zakar*. In addition, Johannes B. Baeur argues that, the word ἄρσεν ‘‘literally means *that which discharges sperm* and therefore *male offspring, male child... ἄρσεν is the male sexual partner... including those in homosexual relationships...*’’²¹ Three main things come up in Baeur’s definition of ἄρσεν. First, he argues that the ἄρσεν discharges sperm which then suggests that this male person has reached manhood or maturity where he has developed the capacity to produce male reproductive fluids known as the semen. This in fact differentiates the ἄρσεν as a mature adult male from male children because the latter do not have the natural capacity to ejaculate or release semen. Closely related to this is the sexual functions of the ἄρσεν which leads to the second point by Baeur that the ἄρσεν is a ‘‘male sexual partner.’’ Because the ἄρσεν is said to be discharging sperm, it means it is a male penetrator

¹³ John R. Jones, ‘‘In Christ There Is Neither . . .’: Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ,’’ in David Ferguson et al., *Christianity and Homosexuality: Some Seventh-day Adventist Perspectives*, (Roseville, CA: Adventist Forum, 2008), 9.

¹⁴ Jones, ‘‘In Christ There Is Neither . . .’: Toward the Unity of the Body of Christ,’’ 10.

¹⁵ Fee, *The Epistle to the Corinthians*, 243.

¹⁶ William E. Vine, *Vine’s An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers*, (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 19.

¹⁷ James Strong, ‘‘A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version’’, 16, in James Strong, *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990).

¹⁸ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 212-213.

¹⁹ It is believed that ἄρσεν is derived from a Greek *αἶρω* which means ‘‘to lift.’’ See Strong, ‘‘A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version’’, 8.

²⁰ According to Vine, this term (θήλυς) is derived from the root *thele* meaning ‘‘breast’’. See Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 233.

²¹ Johannes B. Baeur, ‘‘ἄρσεν’’, in Horst Balz and Gerald Schneider (eds.), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1990). Accessed: 16th August 2015

in the sexual act. The last thing which comes up in Baeur's definition of ἄρσεν is the ἄρσεν's involvement in "homosexual relationships." This suggestion conveniently introduces the compound word ἀρσενοκοῖται.

The other word joined to ἄρσενος is κοίται. Κοίται, κοίτη, and κοίτων all belong to the same stock. Each of them gives an idea of sleeping or having sex with another person. Therefore, the phrasal noun ἀρσενοκοῖται which is the plural of ἀρσενοκοῖτης literally means two males who are engaged in sexual intercourse. Evidently, ἀρσενοκοῖται stresses same sex relationships which appear to be a stark deviation from the original plan of sexual relationship. Furthermore, ἀρσενοκοῖτης is used to refer to the male who plays the active role in homosexual intercourse.²² This assertion can be supported by the above description of the male as someone with physical strength. Scientifically, this type of relationship is defined as homosexuality.

In the medical world, the term homosexuality is explained as, "preference for a member of the same sex as one's sexual partner. A homosexual relationship may exist between men or between women; in the latter case, it is called lesbianism. Some individuals may have sexual relationships with members of both sexes. Such persons are known as bisexuals."²³ Some scholars, for instance, Ian Paul and D. F. Wright, have asserted that, the term ἀρσενοκοῖται is not mentioned in any literature prior to 1 Corinthians 6:9, and there is a strong consensus that it is a neologism, coined by Paul from the LXX of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.²⁴ The point being made by Wright and Paul about ἀρσενοκοῖται appears to be entirely accurate, because in the aforementioned verses, though the two words ἄρσενος and κοίτην appear together, they do so as individual words. Though, the two words are mentioned in Leviticus, the idea can still be traced to the book of Genesis.

In Genesis 19:5, it is clear that the men of Sodom are described as demanding to have sex with the angelic beings who have come to visit Lot and his family. Ironically, the Genesis narrator tells that these angelic beings have come for the purpose of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah because of these immoral acts (Gen. 19:1-29). In Leviticus, however, ἀρσενοκοῖται has been codified into the legal framework of Israel. It is discussed under "The Holiness Code" supposedly designed for the priestly institution in Israel. Samuel E. Balentine throws further light on Leviticus 18-20. He says chapters "18 and 20 provide a frame for issues that lead to...exhortations to...keep God's statutes and ordinances."²⁵ He continues to argue that "these exhortations" deal with issues regarding "sexual transgressions."²⁶ Therefore, it can be deduced from the foregoing argument that the issues of same-sex relationships that Paul was dealing with were not new. In Leviticus, it poses a major threat to priests who were supposed to minister before the Lord.

Reflection on Μαλακοι (Effeminate) and Ἀρσενοκοῖται (Homosexuals)

Paul's use of the terms μαλακοι and ἀρσενοκοῖται against the backdrop of their original historical, social and literary context, no doubt, is in reference to the pederastic²⁷ practices in the Graeco-Roman world at the time. Married and other adult men often had sexual relationships not only with prostitutes or slaves, but also with adolescent boys. It is believed that young adolescent boys in the Graeco-Roman world were often endowed with so much beauty as to make them sexually attractive to other males.²⁸ But, this natural endowment is not supposed to be a proclivity for such relationships. In looking at the pederastic relationship at the time, both the penetrator and the one who was penetrated were all abusing their bodies. It can be said that such pederastic relationships in Paul's time may be similar to homosexual relationships found in contemporary times. Some have raised questions about the validity of Paul's argument for contemporary times. What they are simply

²² Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues*, 3rd Ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 69.

²³ James A. Maxwell, et al., *Reader's Digest: Family Health Guide and Medical Encyclopedia based on the Medical Writings of Benjamin F. Miller, M. D.*, (Pleasantville, New York: The Reader's Digest Association, 1976), 453.

²⁴ Paul, *Same-Sex Unions: The Key Biblical Texts*, p. 26. See also Wright, "Homosexuality", in Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid (eds.), *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, 414.

²⁵ Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville: John Knox Press), 150.

²⁶ Balentine, *Leviticus Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 150.

²⁷ "The word Pederasty comes down to us from ancient Greek *paidēraḗstia*, a compound of *pais* (boy) and a derivative of *eran* (to love), meaning 'love of boys.' See Lear "Ancient Pederasty: An Introduction", in Hubbard, *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, 102.

²⁸ Alcardo Zanghellini, *The Sexual Constitution of Political Authority: The 'Trials' of the Same-Sex Desire*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 27.

saying is that the structure of the pederastic relationships which persisted in Paul's time is entirely different from what homosexual relationships are today.

In the Graeco-Roman world, a pederastic relationship was largely built around aristocracy and mutual benefits for the consenting poor partners. The general complexion of homosexuality today reflects mixed needs such as poverty, gender orientation, peer-pressure, psychological, physiological, power, prestige and even spiritual. For instance, three of the above mentioned causes can be singled out and these are the spiritual, psychological and poverty causes. As regards the spiritual cause of homosexuality from the African primal setting, it is believed that, a person can be influenced by an evil spirit to indulge in such immoral acts. In relation to the psychological, it has been argued thus,

Homosexuality usually has a psychological foundation. A boy may identify too strongly with his mother or a girl with her father and ultimately be led to assume that parent's sexual role. Children normally relate more directly to members of their own sex until puberty, when their sexual drive asserts itself and they become heterosexual, or interested in members of the opposite sex. One theory of the cause of homosexuality is that some youngsters fail to mature in this way, but for psychological reasons remain fixated on their own sex.²⁹

Within the Akan social system, the girl child is brought up to be like her mother while the boy child is groomed to be like his father. The way roles are assigned with strong cultural emphasis tends to make these young ones become unnecessarily fixated in those roles. According to the expert opinion of medical practitioners and psychologists as mentioned earlier, if this young adult is unable to break free to appreciate persons of the opposite sex, they are led into the homosexual act.

The third cause to consider here is poverty. In a poverty-stricken society, such as in most African countries, money is often used as a bait to entice young males and females into homosexuality. In their quest to escape their miserable conditions of living, they end up trapped in this immoral act. Whatever the cause may be, it is important to note that same-sex practice is a "particularly egregious violation of the natural order."³⁰ And therefore, "Any hermeneutic roundabout that tries to sanitize or soften Paul's words is liable to obscure the inflection point around which attitudes toward same-sex erotics would be forever altered."³¹ This is perhaps a warning to those who may advocate for homosexuality. From the foregoing argument, for Paul, sexual relations must necessarily be about gender difference, that is, between an adult male and an adult female and within the context of marriage (1 Cor. 7:1-9). Kyle Harper confirms that for Paul, natural sex, for Christians, "came to mean, exclusively, the one configuration of body parts that has generative potential."³²

READING ΜΑΛΑΚΟΙ AND ΑΨΕΝΟΚΟΙΤΑΙ IN AKAN (ASANTE) TEXT

Μαλακοι and ἀρσενοκοίται are translated as *ahohwifo* and *mmarima a wone mmarima da* respectively in the Asante Twi texts. They will be discussed in the manner they appear in the texts.

Ahohwifo (Effeminates)

From the 1964, and 2012 version and YouVersion revision of the Asante text, μαλακοι is translated *ahohwifo*, from the word *ahohwi*. Johann G. Christaller explains the term *ahohwi* as "debauchery, dissoluteness, intemperance, lasciviousness, wantonness...lewdness, licentiousness, extravagance, lavishness, prodigality, rioting..."³³ Thus, the concept of *ahohwifo* suggests "debauchees, sensual or dissipated persons; prodigals, squanderers."³⁴ Christaller's explanation shows that the term has a wide range of meanings. It ranges from sexual misbehaviour to wastefulness. The translation of μαλακοι as *ahohwifo* agrees with the Greek text

²⁹ Maxwell, et al., *Reader's Digest: Family Health Guide and Medical Encyclopedia...*, 453-454.

³⁰ Kyle Harper. *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 94.

³¹ Harper. *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*, 95.

³² Harper. *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*, 145.

³³ Johann G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, (Basel: The Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933), 181.

³⁴ Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, 181.

because previously, it was discovered that the *μαλακοι* can be used to describe not just men but also women who are guilty of addictions to the sins of the flesh. However, the 1932 translators of the Asante text used *ahodomfo* which according to Christaller refers to “effeminacy, delicacy, softness, weakness.”³⁵ He further explains *ahodomfo* as “a weakling; a tender, delicate, effeminate person; one given to pleasure.”³⁶ It appears both translations agree to a large extent in the rendering of *μαλακοι*. Here, Paul is sounding a clear warning to the *mmarima ahohwifo* or *mmaa ahohwifo* to desist from such immoral acts.

It is important to see how the various translators handled the word *μαλακοι*. The translators of the 2012 YouVersion prefixed the term *ahohwifo* with an Akan word *mmarima* (men). This is to suggest that they understood the act of effeminacy as being done by men. Or that they were aware of the possibility of women indulging in such an act. Though the 1932 translators used *ahodomfo* and later translators of the 1964 and 2012 printed editions used *ahohwifo*, they never qualified it with *mmarima*. Why they did not do that has been catered for by the explanation given earlier as to the generic meaning of *μαλακοι*. In the usage of the terms *ahodomfo* and *ahohwifo* in translating *μαλακοι* in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the generic sense which allows them to include both men and women must always be taken into account. Therefore, the prefixed *mmarima* used by the 2012 translators of the YouVersion to qualify *ahohwifo* may be discarded on the evidence provided.

Ernestina Afriyie has, however, argued that the *μαλακοι* are homosexuals because the NIV translates the term as “male prostitutes” while the NAB translates it as “boy prostitutes.”³⁷ As was seen earlier, though the word *μαλακοι* refers to persons who are addicted to the sins of the flesh, Paul’s list of sexual sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9 leads one to posit that *μαλακοι* refers to the passive partners in homosexual relationships; either male or female. Afriyie may, however, be accurate in saying that the *μαλακοι* are strictly male prostitutes since it can be placed in the Graeco-Roman context where *μαλακοι* was used as a term for men who were considered as “soft ones”; that is, for the younger, passive partner in a pederastic (man-boy) relationship.

Mmarima a wone Mmarima Da (Homosexuals)

It appears all the translations of the Asante Twi text, namely, 1932, 1964, and both the printed and YouVersion of the 2012 version agree on the use of the Akan phrase, *mmarima a wone mmarima da*³⁸ to translate *ἀρσενοκοῖται*. The discussion of *ἀρσενοκοῖται* directly leads to the issue of abuse of human sexuality. Describing homosexuality as an abuse case may be considered by some as stereotypical, prejudicial, and insensitive, especially, to those who have endorsed it. However, the researcher believes that homosexuality is a deviation from the norm designed by God to govern human sexuality. James Strong defines *ἀρσενοκοῖτης* as an “abuser of (that defile) self with mankind.”³⁹ Ray S. Anderson speaking on the subject of homosexuality appeals to theological anthropology thus,

One might argue that many homosexual relationships appear to be more “human” in terms of personal sensitivity and support of the other than many heterosexual marriages, but this would require a theological anthropology which unravels everything which has been said to this. It is not enough to interpret the biblical texts which speak judgmentally against homosexuality in such a way that they do not speak against non-promiscuous homosexual attachments. Even if this would remove the ethical onus from some homosexual relationships, it would mean abandoning theological anthropology, not to mention a theology of sexuality... If one wishes to discuss homosexuality as unwarranted sexual behavior one has recourse only to theological ethics, supported by the biblical prooftexts which mention homosexuality. In light of the contemporary debate over the hermeneutical implications of texts which can be shown to have a distinct cultural overtone, it is understandable that one would be reluctant to pin the issue on such an ambiguous exercise. A theology of human sexuality has led us to doubt that an argument can be made for homosexual orientation as a possibility fully equivalent to heterosexual

³⁵ Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, 180.

³⁶ Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, 180.

³⁷ Ernestina Afriyie, “Theological and Pastoral Perspectives on Sexuality”, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (2013): 41.

³⁸ Lit. men who sleep with men

³⁹ Strong, “A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament with their Renderings in the Authorized English Version”, 16.

orientation in terms of human personhood as created in the image of God. This is in our judgment the inescapable conclusion drawn from the assumptions established as fundamental to theological anthropology. Many forms and levels of disorder find their way into sexual orientation and behavior; and from the perspective of theological anthropology homosexual orientation is but one of these. From the perspective of pastoral care, a theological anthropology provides its own orientation, which again does not resort to abstract ethical principles but acts from the perspective of the eschatological nature of human personhood itself.⁴⁰

Some biblical anthropologists have responded to the problem of homosexuality as a clear disorder which has made its “way into sexual orientation and behavior.” The human being was created male and female and in the image of God. So, the sexual orientation of human beings is heterosexual and not homosexual. \

For the Akan, the issue of homosexuality has often been looked at from a cultural perspective. That is to say, it is more about what the Akan cultural norms or worldview says than it is about what the western world says. Or better still, it is what the Akan community as a whole says, rather than what the Akan individual says. For the Akan, coitus must necessarily be between a man and a woman who are of mature age. For this reason, any form of homosexual relationship is seriously prohibited. Again, as noted previously, the Akan even frown upon verbal abuses of the sex organs for which reason derogatory names are not used to describe them. The act of homosexuality transcends verbal abuse to physical abuse of the sex organs. So, if the Akan do not entertain the verbal abuse of the sex organs, there is absolutely no way they would allow the physical abuse of the same sex organs.

For the Akan, the primary aim of a sexual relationship is procreation, and thus condemn any act that interferes with that. Daniel O. Bediako-Akoto largely affirms Africans as people who “normally arrange marriages with the view to fostering posterity through childbirth and therefore heterosexual unions have been the preferred option.”⁴¹ Though the argument of procreation as the main reason for marriage among the Akan cannot be sustained to the letter as not all marriages are blessed with children, the Akan still believe that this natural principle of coitus between a man and a woman cannot be sacrificed for pleasure. Thus, the Akan position on homosexuality so far agrees with Paul’s stand on homosexuality (Rom. 1: 26-28; 1 Cor. 6:9) where both condemn it and give the impression that it is a deviation from the natural way of man-woman relationship.

Philip Laryea also seems to add his voice to the many condemnations that have been uttered against homosexuality. In his attempt to show support for the stance of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) when the latter defined homosexuality as “un-African,”⁴² describes it as “un-Ghanaian. The simple reason he gives for his description is that there is no word for it in any of the Ghanaian indigenous languages.”⁴³ He continues to argue thus,

Yet perhaps the lack of a name points to a fundamental value that characterizes most African societies; rites associated with naming are sacred. As in all primal societies, a name, whether for humans or non-humans, is symbolic of the subject so named, such that it is virtually impossible to make a dichotomy between the name and the personality the name seeks to symbolise. The logic holds also for the naming of non-human species, such as animals and inanimate objects that humankind relates with. To name, therefore, is to give recognition to an object so named, a recognition that creates the space for, and engenders, a relationship. To refuse to give a name to an act or event may be seen, therefore, as a deliberate and conscious attempt to have nothing to do with it. This may reflect the taboo nature of the subject under discussion and the resistance that it has faced in many African societies.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 128.

⁴¹ Daniel Osei Bediako-Akoto, *Towards, Holistic Sexual Flourishing in Africa: Another Look at Human Sexuality from a Ghanaian Christian Standpoint with the Presbyterian Church of Ghana as a Case* (Utrecht: Boekencentrum Academic, 2017), 101.

⁴² Philip Laryea, “Homosexuality: A Discussion on the Position of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG)”, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 16, No. 2, (2013): 15.

⁴³ Laryea, “Homosexuality: A Discussion on the Position of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG)”, 16.

⁴⁴ Laryea, “Homosexuality: A Discussion on the Position of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG)”, 16.

As Laryea opines, the Akan also do not have a name for homosexuality (gayness or lesbianism) which therefore shows their dissociation from such a heinous act. Laryea has suggested, “The significant difference between the Western attitude towards homosexuality and the Ghanaian is that whereas in the West attempts are now being made to acknowledge and institutionalize the practice, the majority of Ghanaians still frown on it.”⁴⁵ To be “un-Ghanaian” as suggested by Laryea, he perhaps may be addressing the social and moral character of Ghanaians. Homosexuality among a vast majority of Ghanaians is regarded “alien”, though both Laryea and Sarpong admit it exists among Ghanaians, but according to them, it is not an institutionalized behavior. Bediako-Akoto offers a contrary view to what Laryea has said earlier as to homosexuality not having an indigenous name. Bediako-Akoto argues that,

In fact, among the Akans, for instance, homosexuality has a pre-colonial designation as *ntrumu-ntrumu* (anal-anal). *Ntrumu-ntrumu*, which pre-dates the arrival of the colonialists, clearly describes male-male (gay) sexual activity. On the other hand,... homosexuality did not exist in Africa in the form being argued for today..., the quest for recognition of gay/lesbian relationships in a strict marital sense in Africa today may be seen as something “un-African.” To put this differently, gay and lesbian activities may have been practiced in Africa even before the coming of the European explorers. However,... a same-sex marriage which may be critically described as a typical African marriage may not critically be substantiated... Therefore, diverse kinds of same-sex activities may have gone on in African societies, but situations where families actually transacted such same-sex unions unto marriages in the cultural sense of the word are probably unattested. What is gathered from all that has been said so far is that same-sex relations that have existed in several forms in various parts of Africa may have been permissible in so far as they posed no threat to marriage and procreation... Homosexuality may therefore exist in most communities without much challenge until such persons decide to bring this to the surface for it to be regularized.⁴⁶

It is clear from Bediako-Akoto’s argument that homosexuality is not a recent phenomenon; and the African has vehemently refused to accord it the status of marriage as some are agitating for now. This implies that, as agreed by Bediako-Akoto himself, homosexuality is a sexual irregularity that is inconsistent with the sexual ethics of the African and therefore must be discouraged. This, in fact, reinforces an earlier argument that, among the Akan for instance, marriage or sex life is strictly heterosexual. B. Y. Quarshie says, “It is not surprising then that there does not appear to be a word in traditional African society for a person who practices homosexuality... most African societies, however, remain opposed to the practice and their socialization processes ensure the reinforcement of this view and the values involved.”⁴⁷ Quarshie further states, “Homosexuality in Africa is regarded as a taboo, *musu*, *musuo*, an abomination... Society frowns on it and society in its socialization processes inculcates in children values that regard homosexuality as unacceptable.”⁴⁸

J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu cites Emmanuel Martey (a former Moderator of the General Assembly of PCG) as saying that, “Homosexuality is unbiblical, un-African, abnormal and filthy.”⁴⁹ He continues to argue that while “gay rights” are seen in the West “as human rights issues and demand that the church recognizes the rights of people in such relationships... in Africa... homosexuality is dismissed as a distortion of African cultural values on sex and morality.”⁵⁰ Like Laryea and others, Asamoah-Gyadu admits that the menace exists in Africa but the homosexuals “have historically been stigmatized, called names and have been culturally excluded as engaging in abominable and abhorrent behaviour.”⁵¹

⁴⁵ Laryea, “Homosexuality: A Discussion on the Position of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG)”, 16.

⁴⁶ Bediako-Akoto, *Towards, Holistic Sexual Flourishing in Africa*, 101-102.

⁴⁷ Benhardt Y. Quarshie, “Bringing the Case before the Lord: An African Response to a North American Perspective on the Bible and Human Sexuality”, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*,. 16, no. 2, (2013) 27.

⁴⁸ Quarshie, “Bringing the Case before the Lord”, 27.

⁴⁹ John Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’: Christianity and Media Discussions on Alternative Sexual Lifestyle in Contemporary Africa”, in *Journal of African Christian Thought*, 16, no. 2, (2013): 52.

⁵⁰ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 53.

⁵¹ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 53.

Citing the views of one Ghanaian psychiatrist named Akwasi Osei, who rejects the scientific basis for indulging in homosexual act, Asamoah-Gyadu argues that homosexuality “is a psychological disorder and if there are any human rights attached, it must be ‘the right to be treated.’” He outlines the five reasons why the genetic hoax surrounding homosexuality must be rejected. He says,

The scientific position, according to Osei, is based on five premises: first, that homosexuality is genetic; second, homosexuals have an excess of the hormones of the opposite sex, which means that females could behave as if they were males in sexual relations with other females, and males similarly; third, an increasing number of people are declaring themselves homosexuals and it cannot therefore be abnormal; fourth, homosexuality is not treatable because it is normal behaviour; and fifth, when homosexuality is an act between two consenting adults, it must not be treated as abnormal behaviour.⁵²

He further posits, “It is based on these premises that, according to Osei, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in their code of mental disorders.”⁵³ Asamoah-Gyadu continues to explain how African Christianity sees homosexuality. He says, “homosexuality is considered to be behaviour that lies within the realm of demonic affliction and results from curses upon a person’s life.”⁵⁴ He further adds,

One of the main effects of demonic activity on people is the display of ‘strikingly odd behaviour,’ much of which has to do with the area of sexual relations. For example, unhappy marriages could result from some prior marriage of one of the partners to a spirit, which could mean the spirit of a traditional deity or even a witch, usually from a person’s family home. Spiritual marriages, Paul Gifford explains, are detected by a lack of desire for marriage, the cessation of monthly periods for women, impotence in men, or an unsatisfactory sexual life. Demons, it is believed, enter people through demonic doorways, which include misuse of the human body through inappropriate sexual activities, such as gay/lesbian relations. The orifices of the body are the commonest demonic doorways and increasingly, the teaching in African Pentecostal churches is that homosexual activity easily leads to demonisation.⁵⁵

Further, in elucidating how African evangelicals respond to homosexuality, he says that “The general African evangelical position on homosexuality, then, is that it undermines the basic message of redemption and the power of the cross to transform lives. In other words, homosexuality is a symptom of a deeper problem, namely, ‘diminution of the authority of Holy Scripture’ by theological liberals.”⁵⁶ He argues that, according to African evangelicals, the homosexuals are indulging in “ritual filth” and “can only be cleansed through repentance and forgiveness.”⁵⁷ He indicates that “in the Ghanaian context, for example, there are festivals among the Akan of the South named *Odwira*, which means ‘to cleanse.’ The heart of the festival is the slaughtering of the sacrificial lamb, with the blood being sprinkled symbolically on people and designated facilities to indicate the cleansing of the nation to achieve ritual purity.”⁵⁸ It is clear from the foregoing argument that Asamoah-Gyadu looks at the spiritual, scientific/psychological, and cultural perspectives as they relate to Africans in general and Ghanaians in particular.

HOMOSEXUALITY, NATURE AND PROCREATION IN AKAN CULTURE

Some of the reasons why the campaign for homosexuality seems to have met with stiff opposition in Ghana and especially among the Akan community are that it is unnatural and does not lead to procreation. Within Akan moral laws, homosexuality is not accepted because it is considered unnatural. The understanding of the Akan people of human sexuality can be best examined within the context of the understanding of the universe

⁵² Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 57.

⁵³ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 57.

⁵⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 55.

⁵⁵ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 55.

⁵⁶ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 55.

⁵⁷ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 55.

⁵⁸ Asamoah-Gyadu, “‘Homosexuality and Ritual Filth’...”, 57.

and the harmony that ought to exist between humanity and the natural environment. As in the natural world, it appears to be an impossibility for a male animal to have sexual intercourse with another male animal, so are human beings expected to avoid all forms of homosexual tendencies or practices.

Although chapter five of the 1992 constitution of Ghana enjoins rights and freedoms on Ghanaians, the criminal ACT 1960 is completely against homosexual relationships and describes it as “unnatural carnal knowledge”. Section 104 states,

- (1) whoever has unnatural carnal knowledge (a) of any person of the age of sixteen years or over without his consent shall be guilty of a first degree felony and shall be liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years and not more than twenty-five years; or (b) of any person of sixteen years or over with his consent is guilty of a misdemeanor; or (c) of any animal is guilty of a misdemeanor.
- (2) Unnatural carnal knowledge is sexual intercourse with a person in an unnatural manner or with an animal.⁵⁹

The law seems to brace together homosexuality and bestiality. Therefore, this suggests that in the eyes of the framers of the law, homosexuality and bestiality stand together. Some Ghanaian human rights activists who may be asking for the rights of Ghanaian homosexuals to be respected, seem to have failed to fully appreciate the constitutional clause on fundamental human rights activists in Ghana. In Article 14, section 1, subsection (a), the law says, “Every person shall be entitled to his personal liberty and no person shall be deprived of his personal liberty except in the following cases and in accordance with a procedure permitted by law – (a) in the execution of a sentence or order of a court in respect of a criminal offence of which he has been convicted...”⁶⁰ This implies that the rights of the so-called homosexuals are subject to the law. This of course narrows the space or better still removes the space for human rights activism on homosexuality in Ghana.

Again, the Akan attach great importance to procreation as the basis of life. The Akan understanding of what the composition of human person is ontologically, involves *ɔkra* (soul), *mmogya* (blood), *ntorɔ* (spirit/ semen) and *nipadua* (body). Of all these constituent parts, *mmogya* and *ntorɔ* are what is believed to bring about procreation. Whenever the Akan looks at *mmogya*, these two meanings come up; first, the ordinary blood which flows in both human beings and animals; second, the mystical blood which is the interpretation the Akan has brought to bear on blood. It is the mystical meaning of blood which enables the Akan to differentiate his or her *abusua* (lineage/clan) from all other persons’ *mmusua* (lineages/clans). For this reason, the Akan define *mmogya* as that which the individual person inherits from the mother and binds him or her to the mother and gives him or her status and membership in one of the Akan *mmusuakuo* (matrilineal clans). J. B. Danquah and Afriyie say that, the Akan traces his or her family through his or her mother’s *mmogya*.⁶¹

Again, the *ntorɔ/ntɔn* or *sunsum* (spirit/semen) of the father, plays an instrumental role in the conception of the embryo in the womb. Rattray states, “it is the *ntorɔ* of the man mingling with the *mmogya* (blood) of the woman that form the child.”⁶² Thus, the mixing of a woman’s *mmogya* with the man’s *ntorɔ* during sexual intercourse is what brings *abawoɔ* (procreation). The Akan have a saying that *ɔba firi ɔsi yem na ɔkɔtɔ oni yem*, (lit. “The child comes from its father’s womb and it goes to its mother’s womb”).⁶³ This is to say that, the father provides the semen/spirit (*sunsum*) which creates the child but the mother contributes *mmogya*, which nurtures it in the womb. It can be deduced that both the *mmogya* and *ntorɔ* are necessary for the process of procreation. Thus, drawing on the Akan theory of conception, it can be said that any sexual act which does not involve the opposite sexes is contrary to the Akan culture. In other words, the Akan approve of heterosexual relations while homosexual relations are totally condemned.

⁵⁹ ACTs of Ghana. Criminal Code, 1960 (ACT 29), Section 104, Accessed on 5th August, 2018 from www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/gh/gh010en.pdf

⁶⁰ Ghana’s Constitution of 1992 with Amendments through 1996, Chapter five, Article 14, Section 1, 21. Accessed on 10th August 2020 from https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Ghana_1996.pdf?lang=en

⁶¹ J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*. 2nd ed., (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1968), 202; see also Afriyie, “The Theology of the Okuapehene’s *Odwira*”, 74-75.

⁶² Rattray, *Ashanti*, 36.

⁶³ Peggy Appiah, Kwame Anthony Appiah, & Ivory Agyeman-Duah, *Bu Me Be: Proverbs of the Akans*, (Oxfordshire, UK: Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd., 2007), 13.

CONCLUSION

Following from the insights shared on *μαλακοι* and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* from both Pauline and Ghanaian (Akan) cultural perspectives, it becomes clear that legalizing homosexuality or granting the LGBTQ+ people their rights to indulge in these unnatural acts is an embracing failure on the religious, cultural and moral institutions of Ghanaians. Ghanaians, must cherish their rich ethical heritage on human sexuality and not allow any imposition of Western idiosyncrasies or culture in the name of human rights.

This article concludes with Paul's opening rhetorical question, "Or know you not that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God?" Thus, Paul does not only highlight the different categories of sexual offenders, he says, they "will not inherit the Kingdom of God." It must first be stated here that, the kingdom of God serves as the basis of Pauline theology and in dealing with the eschatological dimension of the kingdom of God, speaks of it as a reward which will be inherited by God's people (I Cor. 6:9-10; cf. 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Col. 1:12; 3:24).⁶⁴ He argues that, when the kingdom of God is finally consummated those who do wickedness will not participate in it. This is to say that, the Christian's present life must be in conformity with their future life so much so that there will not be any form of contradiction as to their status in the kingdom. This is because Christians today must see themselves as active participants in the kingdom affairs by the way they live their lives among all manner of persons (Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17).

From the above discussion, the unrighteous which includes, *μαλακοι* (effeminate) and *ἀρσενοκοῖται* (homosexuals), among others, as Paul mentions in verses 9, will not inherit the kingdom of God. It is worth noting that homosexuality is one of the sins the blood of Jesus removes when homosexuals come to Christ. The question then is, why must homosexuals go back to the act? The false scientific premise on which some proponents of homosexuality base their argument cannot any longer hold, especially, in the light of the evidence provided by Akwasi Osei above. To the Ghanaian, particularly among the Akan, homosexuality is filth which brings with it hardships and curses; so he or she must desist from it. The researcher agrees with those who have argued that the homosexual act is "un-African" and "un-Ghanaian" and therefore, must not be tolerated.

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⁶⁴ Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament: Mark through the Epistles," in Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (eds.), *The Kingdom of God*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 156.

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