

Challenging Procreative Privilege: Equal Rites

by Robert E. Goss

. . . the problem of sexuality has been misnamed in the church as the problem of homosexuality or of non-marital sex. It is time to clarify our moral vision and speak clearly and candidly. The sexual problem we must critique and challenge lies not in people, but rather in prevailing social, cultural and *ecclesial* arrangements. These unjust arrangements stigmatize and devalue self-respecting persons who deviate from the sexist and heterosexist norm. We must not shy away from declaring in the church and throughout society; our problem is conformity to the unjust norms of compulsory heterosexuality and of gender inequality. This unjust norm must be altered, not those who question it.¹

The second wave of queer liberation in the 1990s has focused on the right to marriage and family. This new emphasis on marriage 'rites' and family rights has placed gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on a collision course with the religious extremists' family values campaign and their adept use of a procreative norm to judge same-sex unions. John Paul II has pledged to fight a European Community resolution approved on 8 February 1994, proposing that same-sex couples be allowed to marry and adopt children. In Brazil, Catholic bishops oppose current legislation that would make it the first country in South America to recognize same-sex unions.

Should the Supreme Court of Hawaii find no compelling reason for denying recognition of same-sex unions as marriages, then the state of Hawaii will be the first US state to recognize same-sex marriages. American electoral politics in 1996 witnessed a wave of prophylactic hysteria in over twenty state legislatures concerned about the possibility of the Hawaii marriage statute and initiated legal measures to ban the recognition of same-sex unions.² State legislatures, the media and the Internet are lit up with the issue of same-sex marriages. From Boston to San Francisco, the religious right and many mainline churches actively oppose legislation to recognize domestic partnerships, as they are seen as a threat to the traditional family. Opponents claim that we want to taunt heterosexuals with our subversive notions of sexuality and marriage and that we want to damage the notions of family and marriage so pivotal to American life. It would seem that heterosexuals have done a fine job on their own to injure the institution of marriage. Opponents scapegoat same-sex marriage as causing the erosion of families but refuse to look at the breakdown with honest self-examination. President Clinton, likewise, has announced that he would sign the Republican Marriage Defense Act, a federal law proposed as a pre-emptive strike against the Hawaii Supreme Court. It is no more than mean-spirited queer-bashing, legislating away our rights to love and receive civil recognition for our relationships.

For many churches, homosexuality renders the connection between sexuality and procreation arbitrary, thus threatening the privileging of heterosexual marriage and

traditional families.³ They oppose the conferral of the legal right of marriage to same-sex couples or even the recognition of domestic partnerships, claiming that same-sex marriages would do long-term damage to society's most important institution. Same-sex unions have neither *ecclesial* nor civil recognition. Nor do they have the legal protections and benefits afforded to heterosexual marriage. Only with the extension of domestic partnership benefits in a number of cities do same-sex unions receive some of the benefits extended to married couples.

A few churches, such as the Unitarian-Universalist, Quaker, Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, and some Episcopalian dioceses, have taken the prophetic stance of blessing same-sex unions. Some Catholic and Protestant clergy privately bless same-sex unions of their parishioners in defiance of their polities. While I was a Jesuit priest, I blessed a number of same-sex unions, some of which were covertly blessed in Catholic rectories with the approval of the pastor. Equal rites for same-sex unions provide a pressing theological and pastoral issue for mainline denominational churches.

Procreative Privilege

Most Christian churches identify homosexuality with unadulterated pleasure, threatening their view of traditional Judeo-Christian marriage and family and violating the procreative norm of marriage. Part of the difficulty lies in the theological separation of pleasure from procreation. This split results from the Christian separation of *eros* from *agape* and the subsequent devaluation of sexual love-making in favor of reproduction. Conservative Christian critics of domestic partnership legislation and *ecclesial* blessing of same-sex unions argue that the primary purpose of marriage is procreation. Since translesbigays participate in non-procreative love-making, they cannot marry and participate in the procreative purpose of marriage. Same-sex unions are unfit to bless because they do not conform to the procreative norms of marriage, an openness to produce children. Some Catholics further argue that same-sex marriages are 'hostile to the regeneration of the female body and to the symbolism of social regeneration in which the body is necessarily linked and has, historically, given rise'.⁴ This point of view stresses women's unique capacities to create life and the procreative function of marriage, but ultimately this Catholic perspective supports patriarchal notions of marriage, failing to respect Women's reproductive choices and control over their bodies.

Procreativity is the central symbol of marriage, and the link-age of sex, marriage, and procreativity provides the foundation for the moral condemnation of homosexuality. It becomes the basis for interpreting the covenant theologies of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures⁵ Procreativity forms the central norm for judging sexual relations of opposite-sex and same-sex unions. Society, and churches in particular, have a vested interest in stable, committed relationships for the rearing of children.

Procreationism is a Christian reduction of the purpose of human sexuality to reproduction. It disdains all forms of sexual expression that are open to human life except for penile-vaginal intercourse Procreationism has become the doctrine of traditional family values. It refuses to understand any variant of sexuality outside of marriage. Most Christian churches refuse to understand homosexuality as a variant of sexuality along the

lines of childlessness or celibacy. Churches sanction the marriage of infertile couples or couples who intend to remain childless. This practice is logically inconsistent when same-sex couples are denied the legal and *ecclesial* recognitions afforded childless heterosexual couples.⁶ Unmarried heterosexual couples always have the option of marriage, but same-sex couples have no such option. Many married couples who practice some form of birth control method do not believe that they must be open to procreation each time when they engage in love-making. Sterile couples are still recognized as married.

For many conservative Christians, queer sexuality is an expression of sexuality contrary to heterosexuality opposing views of the interdependent values of reproduction, complementarity, and responsibility. Personal fulfillment, or the reduction of human sexuality to pleasures are often used as charges against queers who are accused of not engaging in procreativity and thereby violating or becoming independent of the creative designs of God. This charge results from a narrow procreationism that restricts procreativity to biologicalism and the literal reproduction of human life. Human sexuality is far more than the biological connection of bodies. Procreationism is not procreativity for procreativity, I will argue, includes human reproduction but is not limited merely to it. It includes notions of social reproduction, renewal, and transformation.

Protestant arguments for limiting the definition of marriage result from a notion of the complementarity of the sexes and its conflation with the biblical notion of covenant. Catholic arguments on marriage, on the other hand, are primarily drawn from a natural law tradition of human sexuality. It maintains the plumbing theory of sexual organs: the penis in the vagina is the only natural form of sexual intercourse because the sexual organs 'fit' and were intended for that purpose. The failure of Protestant and Catholic arguments for limiting marriage suffer from literalism: a biblical fundamentalism or natural law literalism. Both fail to understand the metaphoric quality of the biblical traditions and the metaphoric dimensions of human sexuality. Both fail to grasp the metaphoric and inclusive dimensions of human procreativity.

I do not dispute the value of families or Christian marriage and their procreativity but advance the argument for the blessing of same-sex unions by broadening notions of family and procreativity. To charge that same-sex unions are unable to transmit life does not mean that they are neither life-affirming nor life-producing. The churches use procreativity as a weapon to argue against the acceptance of same-sex or any alternative forms of relationships. Translesbigay unions, however, can be just as loving covenants as the unions of heterosexual couples. I challenge the last stronghold of patriarchal privilege, that of procreative privilege of religious extremists. Heterosexual unions are not the only covenanted relationships that are procreative. In fact, I will argue that same-sex unions can be procreative and regenerative and deserve the social recognitions of marriage and family afforded heterosexual couples by the churches. Procreativity is not a heterosexual privilege, and the Protestant notion of biblical covenant and Catholic natural law theology can be widened to include queer procreativity. For years translesbigays have formed committed, stable relationships. Now we are demanding official recognition for these unions—domestic partnerships benefits, parenting, adoptions, and custody rights to children. It is a timely issue of justice for the churches to revisit. I will examine the notion of same-sex unions as procreative with the Protestant notions of covenant and Catholic

natural law.

Same-Sex Unions as Covenants

Christian ethicist Karen Lebacqz notes the inadequacy of the traditional Christian emphasis on sexuality as procreative and unitive. Christianity has condemned all sexuality outside of heterosexual marriage; this condemnation includes both single heterosexual and translesbigay persons. Lebacqz has widened the normative Christian understanding of human sexuality to include the God-given purpose of sexuality as vulnerability:

Sexuality has to do with vulnerability. Eros, the desire for another, the passion that accompanies the wish for sexual expression, makes one vulnerable. It creates possibilities for great joy but also for great suffering. To desire another, to feel passion, is to be vulnerable, capable of being wounded.⁷

‘Appropriate vulnerability’, for Lebacqz, becomes a means for Christians to comprehend singled and coupled sexuality of all sexual orientations:

Vulnerability may be the presentation for both union and procreation: without a willingness to be vulnerable, to be exposed, to be wounded; there can be no union. To be ‘known’, as Scriptures so often describes the sexual encounter, is to be vulnerable, exposed, open. Sexuality is therefore a form of vulnerability and is to be valued as such. Sex, *eros*, passion are antidotes to the human sin of wanting to be in control or to have power over another. ‘Appropriate vulnerability’ may describe the basic intention for human life—which may be experienced in part through the gift of sexuality.⁸

Appropriate vulnerability for Lebacqz underscores the human capacities to be affected and be deeply affected by one another. Appropriate vulnerability reflects the covenant metaphor of the Hebrew scriptures for mutuality and intimacy, inclusive of the *eros* for communion and the *eros* for procreation. For Lebacqz, any sexual action that violates the norm of appropriate vulnerability is wrong. Rape, the use of sex as a weapon, child molestation, coercive sex, addictive sexual behaviors, unloving sex, etc. shut down *eros* because vulnerability is unequal, coercive, or destructive. Therefore, unequal vulnerability is wrong because it reduces sexual actions to an expression of power over someone. Feminist writers like Carter Heyward, Marie Fortune, Christine Gusdorf, and Elizabeth Stuart have developed similar lines on mutuality, justice-doing, right relating, and friendship for comprehending Christian sexual relations.⁹

Lebacqz’s link of a singles’ sexual ethic to appropriate vulnerability has applicability to gay/lesbian sexuality. In fact, she acknowledges such an application to same-sex couples: ‘Gay and lesbian unions, long condemned by the church because of their failure to be procreative, might also express appropriate vulnerability’.¹⁰ Appropriate vulnerability marks the sexual covenants between opposite-sex and same-sex partners.

Forging a sexual covenant includes the covenantal elements of mutuality, love, justice and compassion. Lebacqz stresses the relational primacy of the covenant which the Protestant reformers comprehended as companionship and which more recent Catholic theology has understood as the unitive function of marriage. Companionship or the unitive dimension of marriage exists in same-sex couples as well. It may also exist in other than pair bonded relationships, but this is not the focus of this article.

The Presbyterian Special Committee on Human Sexuality developed the biblical notion of justice-love along the lines of Lebacqz's appropriate vulnerability as the principal norm for evaluating sexual relationships, including same-sex relationships:

To do justice-love means seeking right-relatedness with others and work to set right all wrong relations, especially distorted power dynamics of domination and subordination. Embracing the goodness of our sexuality, of our erotic desire for wholeness and connectedness is, therefore, a godly gift to us. Erotic power, rightly ordered, grounds and moves us on, gently yet persistently, to engage in creating justice with love for ourselves and all others.¹¹

The Presbyterian Committee attempted to reclaim a passionate biblical spirituality which could embrace gender and sexual justice as a Christian ethic of empowerment and wholeness. The notion of 'justice-love' emerged from the root biblical metaphor of covenant, and it becomes a vehicle for criticizing patriarchy in its manifestations of misogyny and homophobia. 'Justice-love' is a criterion that can equally be applied to all Christian sexual relationships.

Justice, compassion, and love signify the creative presence of God's reign, and any notion of covenanted sexual love between partners needs to include the elements that signify the presence of God's reign. Dorothee Soelle relates human sexuality to God's reign: 'The greatest project I can name is the quest for justice, what Jesus called building the kingdom of God. Hunger for justice is part of the love energy that is set free in sexual relations.'¹² Genuine sexual love opens the hearts and mind of lovers to other people in need, and this is what Jesus meant by God's reign. Christian ethicist James Nelson arrives at a similar conclusion when he notes that the 'incorporation of our sexuality into God's reign means expression in acts shaped by love, justice, equality, fidelity, mutual respect, compassion, and grateful joy. These are criteria for the covenant that apply regardless of one's orientation.'¹³

Same-sex unions are frequently without the conjugal stereo types and hierarchies found in heterosexist (not heterosexual) marriages; they are egalitarian, representing what Elisabeth Schussler-Fiorenza has called the 'discipleship of equals'. Same-sex unions can be life-giving, loving, just, mutual, tender, sensual, nurturing, cooperative, creative, and compassionate:

The blessing of same-sex unions represents the *basilic* (God's reign)

practice of solidarity; it recognizes the union as sexual praxis, sexual action committed to God's reign. Basilic practice starts with the couple's commitment to love, solidarity, and God's justice-doing, and it extends outward to the base community and those in need of God's justice. Basilic practice accents the creative mutual love that is the primary focus of coupling. Their love-making becomes erotic power sharing in service of God's reign. It attempts to integrate pleasure as a positive component of erotic union. Their love-making also represents the practice of God's reign in an inclusive discipleship of equals, shared resources, and table service. It practices an oppositional *basilic* model of relationship, contrary to hierarchical model of heterosexism marriage.¹⁴

Queer Christians and Jews reconstruct the biblical accounts of the covenant made between Jonathan and David and Ruth and Naomi as applicable to their unions.¹⁵ These covenantal narratives between same-sex couples are the most often read Hebrew Scriptures used in Jewish and Christian rites for the blessing of same-sex unions. Mona West's recent reading of the Book of Ruth moves beyond the typical reading of same-sex as pairbonded, covenanted relationships. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz adopt procreative strategies, manipulate the inheritance laws, and Jewish traditions to create family. West claims,

Ruth, Boaz, and Naomi provide our community with an example in which we have been creating families through our history as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people... Certainly, there are ways we in the queer community manipulate laws to overcome the barriers that deny the legality of our relationships. We also work the system to make our relationships more permanent and secure. We do this through domestic partnerships that allow us such benefits as health insurance, accident and life insurance, housing rights, and use of recreational facilities. We take each other's last names, buy homes together, make wills, give durable power of attorney for health care and finances—all in the face of an ambiguous legal system that discriminates against us. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz probably would be proud of the ways in which we continue to follow their strategies for creating family and having our relationships blessed.¹⁶

Catholic theologian Andre Guindon also points to Ruth and Naomi as the patron saints for the procreative strategies of same-sex couples. It becomes very pointed, especially with the artificial insemination strategies frequented by queers. Ruth is looking for a legal inseminator to present a child to Naomi, with whom she has made an earlier spousal covenant.¹⁷ With Naomi's guidance, she seduces Boaz into a levirate marriage to become pregnant with a child. Upon the birth of the child, the village women acknowledge Ruth's son as her covenanted partner's son, declaring, 'A son has been born to Naomi' (Ruth 4.17). The two women risk everything within a patriarchal structure to create a family visible only to other women. There is a poignant parallel to contemporary situations where same-sex couples have had to develop procreative strategies to have children and

to keep low social profiles so that the patriarchal state may not take away their children.

Christian same-sex unions can express what Lebacqz calls ‘appropriate vulnerability’ or represent God’s gratuitous reign in the midst of our society. Lebacqz’s notion of appropriate vulnerability opens itself to wider notions of social procreativity. Appropriate vulnerability expresses a solidarity with the biblical God who is author of sexual fecundity and justice-love. Both opposite-sex and same-sex couples have an equal opportunity to express the procreativity of the Creator God. Such procreativity takes on numerous social and cultural shapes. It expresses a connectedness with God, who is author of sexual fecundity and justice-love. Procreativity may refer to the literal renewal of the earth through human reproduction or reproductive strategies of a renewing society, or it may also refer to the contributions of inclusive love and justice.

The healthy model of covenanted relationships in the Hebrew Scriptures is primarily expressed in the image of the God who makes a covenant with the weak, the helpless, the troubled or the alienated. God remains faithful and steadfast to Israel, a small and insignificant nation, as a covenanted spouse or loving parent. The metaphor of covenant encompasses God’s passionate desire to be a loving companion to Israel; it enfleshes a divine *eros*—God’s creative energy and passion for loving connectedness, compassion, and justice. God’s covenant relationship with Israel becomes the primal healthy model for marriage and family in the Hebrew Scriptures. The metaphor of covenant includes gratuitous love, compassion, and justice as essential elements. Thus, the notion of procreativity is sublated within God’s gracious relation with Israel; it remains a part of God’s passion for creating love and justice. The biblical notion of covenant requires a discussion of procreativity.

Same-Sex Unions as Naturally Procreative

Historically, Catholic and often Anglican theologies of sexuality invoke natural law as the unwritten law embedded in creation. These natural law theologies are often nothing more than biological reductionism and fail to open sexuality to its non-literal dimensions. One of the most creative Catholic moral theologians is the Canadian, the late Andre Guindon, who embeds sexual relationships within the notion of sexual fecundity. Sexual fecundity includes the dimensions that Christian tradition has understood as procreativity and much more. No longer does he reserve the notion of human sexual procreativity for heterosexual marriage, but applies it to celibates and gays/lesbians. Guindon explores the possibility whether gay/lesbian (and I would include transgendered people and bisexuals as well) sexual language can be procreative or fruitful for the human community. The Vatican threatened him with an ecclesial silencing for his theological discourse on the fecundity of human sexuality that allowed for a gay sexual fecundity. Guindon shifts his discussion from homosexuality as acts to gay speech, and the context of fruitful sexual language provides the criterion for judging gay/lesbian sexual language as fruitful:

With the human fecundity approach, we focus on the task of each individual to grow, through the sexual language, into a whole self. Hence, in the case of gays and lesbians, the main ethical issue lies in their willingness (or unwillingness) to achieve the truth of their existence by creatively

expressing themselves in the light of their living options, and by wisely discerning appropriate means. If the moral task consists in making one's own truth or in making sense of one's own life, then we are finally coming to grips, in this approach, with the crucial question of an ethical project for lesbians and gays.¹⁸

Guindon does not dismiss the capacity of gays/lesbians to communicate sexually well with their own sex, but points out a deficit in the lack of other-sex feedback:

To be fruitful, sexual relationships between human beings presuppose both sameness and differentness... Fecund sexual relationships between human beings then, also presuppose differentness, that whereby the other is really other. Otherness is the basic condition of real mutuality. The other is, by definition, one who is different from myself, therefore one who may unsettle me, disturb me, astonish me, challenge me. Conflict, its negotiation through interaction and reconciliation, is the very law of moral development... Yet, the other's otherness in the male-female sexual dialogue carries within it a potential for self-discovery in one's male-female humanity which is not present in the same-sex otherness of the other.¹⁹

The other's otherness challenges each partner in his or her assumptions about the opposite sex. Same-sex relationships, according to Guindon, run the risk of gradually losing the sense of mystery of the other with its differences, conflicts, and negotiations. Here Guindon's arguments fall very short of a promising development in Catholic moral theology. If Guindon had had further opportunity to explore in depth same-sex relationships and interview various partners, he would have discovered that there is a strong sense of the otherness within each partner. Otherness is not gender-specific but partner-specific. Couples, whether opposite or same-sex, always run the risk of losing a sense of otherness when intimacy breaks down. Life partners in same-sex relationships will often describe their growth in friendship, intimacy, and community. They also recognize the need to give each partner the space to be himself or herself. Guindon points out the need for queers to adopt three developmental moral strategies to compensate for what their sexual language does not automatically foster. First, queers need to dialogue and learn from different voices. They can form close friendships across gender boundaries and sexual preferences; however, they may not be able to decode the sexual language of the opposite sex. Guindon acknowledges that the dialogue between the sexes does also contain non-sexual components and modalities, and it is healthier to expand one's world of experience to include relationships with non-gays/lesbians. Guindon, for example, fails to understand the close warm relationships that develop between heterosexual women and gays or the relationships of lesbians with heterosexual men. The dialogue between sexes may well be more advanced and developed in some modalities within the queer community than within some parts of the heterosexual world where sexist gender roles often control the relationships between men and women.

Secondly, for Guindon, many gays/lesbians need to break some of the dysfunctional elements of ghetto existence to develop an inner identity and ego-strength.

Queer group solidarity has offered cultural space where many of us have come to accept our sexual orientation and recover from the damage of a homophobic society. The queer ghetto provides safe space for coming out and protection against cultural violence. Though I generally agree with the need to break out of our ghetto existence, it is for reasons of social transformation and survival from the violence of the religious extremists.

The third relational strategy consists in openness to growth. Openness to growth requires authenticity and integrity; it requires 'coming out', making translesbigay sexual praxis a visible presence in the world. Guindon notes that the last remedial moral strategy is equally applicable to heterosexual people. I would add that heterosexuals need to learn and dialogue with the different voices of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people. They need to break their own patriarchal patterns of gender hierarchies and homophobic oppression.

Guindon admits that same-sex couples 'who remain in a partnership generally do so by the strength of their mutual love and dedication and because of a highly qualitative, relational sexual fidelity'.²⁰ He recognizes that same-sex couples can represent gratuitous love:

Gay persons whose sexual language is fruitful in faithfulness to a partner, in forgiveness towards their enemies, and in compassion for the oppressed have indeed mastered the art of sexual love in a way which can only build the Christian community. They celebrate love with a gratuity which testifies to the fact that their love is indeed Christian love.²¹

Guindon has expanded the notion of sexual fecundity from a literal definition of procreation to a metaphorical procreativity. He challenges the traditional misreadings of God's invitation to participate in creation as literal biologism. Giving birth to offspring is only one of the many procreative possibilities open to human beings. Forging a sexual covenantal relationship, I would claim, is also validated by the inclusiveness of its love, its capacity for compassion, and the promotion of social justice.

James Nelson follows a similar a line of finding religious meaning in sexual unions:

Sexuality is a sign, a symbol, and a means of our call to communication and communion... The mystery of our sexuality is the mystery of our need to reach out to embrace others both physically and spiritually. Sexuality thus expresses God's intention that we find our authentic humanness in relation.

22

Procreativity does not merely include the creation of children, but also service and creative endeavors for humanity. Human procreativity includes the elements of trust, solidarity, appropriate-vulnerability, justice-love, and right-relatedness. For Guindon, the sexual fecundity of a couple, whether heterosexual or homosexual, can include compassionate ministry to the disenfranchised, involvement in an AIDS service organization, volunteer outreach, the struggle for civil rights, and the fight for social justice. Feminist theologian Dorothee Soelle likewise extends human procreativity beyond social

life: 'The earth is a sexual planet, and we affirm its being good in celebrating the true richness of the human being in loving and making love. We are erotically connected with the world.'²³ Ecofeminists and gay theologian Michael Clark rightly connect our sexuality to the liberation and healing of the earth from environmental abuse.²⁴ Human procreativity participates as well in the creation and renewal of the natural world; it includes eco-justice.

Translesbigays can express a life-affirming vision of sexuality, gender, and freedom. Queer sexual *praxis* must obviously enjoy a certain amount of visibility to have a social impact. This means that Christian same-sex couples need to be out of the closet to be procreative, to have impact upon the Christian community and to challenge society to change. When closeted same-sex relationships are blessed, can they reach their procreative potential in renewing the community? Closetedness does not preclude procreativity it only narrows and restricts the procreative potentiality.

Contrary to an implication within Guindon's arguments, I would maintain that same-sex fecundity is not second-rated to heterosexual fecundity. The novel tonalities of queer sexual language provide a critique of dominant cultural meanings of sexuality and gender. Modeling a relational parity, Christian same-sex unions can critique relations that are patriarchal despotic, abusive, and dysfunctional. Healthy same-sex couples tend to be egalitarian, cooperative, flexible, mutual, sensual, and communicative of the justice-love of the biblical witness. These covenant relations build up the Christian community and provide the foundation for transformational social change into God's reign. Queer unions provide a signpost of cultural change whereby cultural inclusion and diversity replaces exclusionary patterns of sexual and gendered power relations. They can be open signposts of what the Hebrew Scriptures envision as covenant or of the community envisioned in Jesus' practice of God's reign.

Queer Procreativity Families of Choice

Translesbigay people are openly seeking church blessings, raising children, and demanding civil recognition of their partners as spouses. The narrow definition of family as two opposite-sex parents legally married and with children marginalizes a number of families: singles, single parents divorced and remarried, extended families, and families of choice. Same-sex couples fall in the category of families of choice but often participate in some of the other forms of families just listed. They remain in partnership through dedication, mutuality, love, and commitment despite social adversity and pressures. There are no legal or *ecclesial* bonds to hold same-sex couples together except the daily commitment or the loving choice to stay together. Same-sex couples like all healthy couples grow as they work to sustain intimacy, honesty, and open communication.

These deliberate commitments of same-sex couples have also included the decision to raise children and create families of choice. Today, same-sex couples are raising children in a variety of circumstances and through a variety of means. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are as capable of biological procreation as are heterosexuals, and many same-sex couples choose to have children. A number of procreative strategies have been adopted by queer couples to produce and raise children and to create families outside the narrow definition of traditional family. This decision to raise children and

create family is what Guindon has characterized as sexual fecundity. It is what the Christian tradition has identified as procreation. This decision for procreativity extends the love boundaries of the couple to include children.

Sexual procreativity may take social shape in form of parenting or co-parenting. Many gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people have custody or share custody of their own children through a former heterosexual marriage. Estimations of lesbian parents range between one to five million while the estimations of gay parents range from one to three million.²⁵ Frequently, two lesbians who had previously been married have joint custody of their children. A gay parent may share joint custody of his children with his wife. The other partner of a same-sex couple often becomes a co-parent to the children of his or her spouse. In September 1993, Massachusetts' highest court granted Dr Helen Cooksey parental rights to the five-year-old daughter of her lesbian spouse, Dr Susan Love.²⁶ They attend their church as a Christian family like many other families in attendance, except that their church does not recognize them as married.

Many same-sex couples do not undertake procreative strategies unless they really want children and are committed to raising them. They have made a conscious choice to share their love with a child by the time of implementing a procreative strategy. They have created an environment of love to raise children. There are too many unwanted children within families and within the foster care system. The positive decision of same-sex couples to raise children provides a foundational basis for describing their families as families of choice. They have adopted a number of other strategies to extend their love to others and create their own families.

Some couples have adopted procreative strategies of producing children through reproductive methods such as artificial insemination, *in vitro* fertilization, or surrogate motherhood. Some lesbians have become parents through artificial insemination. New technology has allowed several lesbians to be artificially inseminated with semen whose male DNA has been replaced by the partner's DNA. A lesbian clergy friend, intending to go through the process of replacing the male DNA of the sperm donor, told me facetiously, 'I can now be a father'. Some gay couples have had their female friends or lesbian friends artificially inseminated with their own sperm to carry their children. These practices have increasingly become more commonplace.

Same-sex couples may choose an alternative procreative strategy by becoming foster parents while others have adopted the throw-away children of our society: crack-cocaine addicted children, HIV+ babies, mentally challenged children, children of color, third-world children, etc. Several ex-Catholic religious and priests in relationships that I know have adopted children. Two former religious I know have formed a family with two lesbian lovers around the adoption of several African-American children. Interracial adoptions have become quite common. An Episcopal clergy and his lover have adopted two children. Their love felt the need to include children. Again, many couples have to maintain a low profile because the state adoption laws deny them access to children. Adoption and foster care provide homes for many children who do not have parents willing or able to raise them. These practices are far less visible in conservative states where same-sex parents have lost custody of their children because of their sexual orientation. These same states have restricted queers the opportunity to provide foster or adoptive homes, and the ones who are hurt by these laws are the children. Some of the

throw-away or unwanted children are adopted by same-sex parents. I am aware of a lesbian couple who have adopted several children severely disabled and given up by their parents. No one else wanted the disabled children, and this lesbian couple has given them tremendous love.

Some couples are compelled to take a low profile within the queer community in order to adopt. The desire for children is stronger than active and visible involvement within the queer community. A gay adult student and his lover attempted to adopt a child in the Missouri foster-care system; they were denied custody because of their openness as a couple. Some gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have legally married in order to adopt children and have created extended families with their lovers and friends. What these alternative relationships have consciously created are homes where children can share the benefit of their love and nurturing. They create loving families of choice.

Religious extremists and some state courts have raised questions about whether the child's best interest is served by translesbigay parents. Queer parents, however, differ little from their heterosexual counterparts, contrary to the propaganda of the far right. Queer parents are as capable of being good parents as heterosexual couples. Sexual orientation of parents has nothing to do with the orientation, welfare, and the development of children. Charlotte Patterson concluded from the summary results of thirty different studies on the children of gays and lesbians: 'There is no evidence to suggest that psychological development among children of gay men or lesbians is compromised in any respect relative to studies among the offspring of heterosexual parents'.²⁷ The sexual orientation of parents has no adverse effect on the psychological and moral development of children. The models of equality between same-sex partners may, in fact, be conducive to the development of healthy models of parenting and gender equality for children.

Metaphorical Procreativity

Guindon speaks as well of the sexual fecundity of same-sex couples who do not adopt procreative strategies to extend the love of their relationship. He acknowledges that their sexual praxis can be productive and fruitful in the same way as celibate sexual fecundity:

Contrary to many other groups, the North American homosexual community represents a sense of shared values and willingness to assert sexuality as part of the whole of life. Their sexual fecundity does have a characteristic social exposure and should contribute to society's own renewal.²⁸

For Guindon, sexual fecundity is further characterized by humanizing social interactions that contribute to society's renewal. Procreativity takes on a metaphorical dimension of inclusive love.

Queer sexual praxis, however, must be visible, out of the closet, if it is to have social and cultural impact. I would further qualify Guindon notion of sexual fecundity as contributing to society's renewal. It remains implicit in his writings, and I suspect that he would concur with my grounding queer fecundity in justice-love, working for cultural change and social justice for all peoples. Sexual fecundity involves more than social renewal; it involves the redemption of society or the transformation of society into God's

reign.

Generally, queer couples experience the need to share the fruit of their love with others. Their love finds the need to include others. My lover, Frank, and I were Jesuits for nearly ten years. When we decided to leave the Society of Jesus and form a covenanted relationship, Jesus the Christ was at the center of our union. We discerned through our respective spiritual directors Jesus' call to discipleship as a couple. We continued to live the Jesuit spirituality by creating an apostolic community of love. From the very beginning, the following of the Christ was fundamental to our union and household. Our love-making and prayer together kept us focused on reaching outside of ourselves to others in need and sharing the grace of God's love that initially brought us together.

Though we did not adopt the procreative strategies of having or adopting children, I would describe our union as metaphorically procreative. The fecundity of our sexual love spilled over into apostolic service to God's people. The more that we experienced the love of one another and the presence of the risen Christ in our love-making, the more we were freed to serve others in need. We took into our household ministry the throwaway people of our society, the developmentally disabled, alienated gays and lesbians, and people living with the painful realities of HIV illness. We created an apostolic community of love for the marginalized and the disenfranchised. Our relationship was sexually as fertile as any prolific Catholic family.

The sexual fecundity of our relationship found further expression in forming an AIDS base community for HIV-positive people, loved ones and friends. It was expressed in the founding of Food Outreach, a major AIDS service organization in St Louis that provides meals and nutritional supplements to indigent HIV-positive people. Compassion and the passion for justice characterized our covenant union and our ministry as a couple. When Frank was diagnosed as HIV-positive, I naturally involved myself with ACT UP, Queer Nation, and several other organizations struggling for gay / lesbian! bisexual / transgendered civil rights. Too many of my friends had died of HIV complications, and too many of my friends had been the targets of violence, harassment, and discrimination because of their sexual orientation. It was a natural evolution of our covenant to grow in the social commitment to the justice-love of ACT UP and the gay/lesbian civil rights movement.

The procreativity of our relationship is not atypical in the translesbigay community. I personally know hundreds of long-term, stable couples who have found the need to express their love in compassionate outreach in volunteer services to the larger community and/or in a passionate commitment to work for justice. Their love overflows into the hundreds of AIDS service organizations, volunteer services outside of the translesbigay community, and the struggle for civil rights. Their love gives birth to compassionate outreach and a commitment to justice. Their love procreates what the biblical metaphors of covenant and God's reign signify: grace, radical inclusionary love, compassion, social care, and justice-love.

Conclusion: Equal Rites

If churches baptize translesbigays, then can churches deny blessing their unions?
²⁹ If all are included in the rite of baptism, then justice requires of the churches an

inclusionary consistency in the performance of other rites. An Episcopal Church—St John the Divine—in Boston decided to bless same-sex unions. The bishop overturned the decision of a predominately heterosexual congregation to bless same-sex unions. The clergy and congregation felt that if the church would not bless same-sex unions, neither would it baptize or bury gays/lesbians. All would be referred to the bishop for such rites. The bishop backed down, and St John the Divine now blesses same sex-unions.

Syndicated lesbian columnist, Amy Adams Squire Strongheart, writes about her same-sex marriage, one of the first open celebrations in the Episcopal Church in America:

Everything was falling into place, and we thanked God for the love She had given us for each other as well as the opportunity to exit the closet of shame and secrecy and openly declare that in the name of the Risen Christ. We knew in our hearts that we were guilty of neither sickness nor perversion, only of being what many churches refer as 'unrepentant'. We felt no remorse for our sexuality and were resolved to never apologize again to anyone for who God had created us to be.³⁰

Strongheart's unrepentant resolve never to apologize for her sexuality recognizes the grace dimensions of her sexuality and covenant friendship with her spouse. A similar unapologetic resolve is necessary for queer Christians to tell their stories of love and to reclaim the rite of marriage for themselves.

My intention is to create dialogue about the love and justice of same-sex relationships within the churches and deconstruct the churches' claims of procreative privilege for heterosexual marriage. This dialogue involves queer Christians who live the gospel and who want to engage in open discussions with their churches about the morality of their sexual lives and their families of choice. The absence of serious listening to the moral lives of queers has led to the debacle of gays/lesbians in the military, translesbigay parents losing custodial rights over their children, the Defense of Marriage Act, and state initiatives to narrowly construe marriage and definitions of family. We, queer Christians, can no longer abrogate moral discussion of our lives to religious extremists but need to articulate and witness the moral qualities of our unions. Our struggle for liberation not only includes equal rights but also equal rites within the churches! Full acceptance within the churches can be nothing less full than acceptance of God's Spirit within our procreative unions and their blessings.

Notes

1. 'Presbyterians and Human Sexuality', *The Report of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality* (Louisville: Presbyterian Church, 1991).
2. In May 1993, the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that the State's refusal to issue civil marriage licenses to same-sex couples under the Hawaii marriage law violates the state constitutional guarantor of equal protection (*Baehr v. Levin* 852 P.2d 44, 74, [Haw.1993]).
3. Twenty-one conservative Christian and Jewish leaders are quite explicit in their definitions of marriage and family: 'husband, wife and children, joined by public recognition and legal bond' ('Morality and Homosexuality', *Wall Street Journal* 24 [February 1994]).
4. J. Bethke-Elshstain, *Commonweal* (22 November 1991), p. 686. Baumann also uses Bethke-Elshstain's argument; cf. P. Baumann, 'An Incarnational Ethic', *Commonweal* (28 January 1994), p. 18.
5. Kroeger upholds the argument for procreative normativity of heterosexual marriage and covenant; see C. Glaser, 'Are Gay Unions Christian Covenants?' in S.B. Geiss and D.E. Messer (eds.), *Caught in the Crossfire* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), pp. 132-40. Contrast J. Stott, 'Homosexual Partnerships: Why Same Sex Relationships Are Not a Christian Option', in *Involvement* (1995), pp. 215-44.
6. Andrew Sullivan has made this point in his arguments for gay marriage; cf. "I'm Here": An Interview with Andrew Sullivan', *America* (8 May 1993), p. 8.
7. K. Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability: Sexual Ethics for Singles', in *Sexual Ethics and the Church: A Christian Century Symposium* (Chicago: The Christian Century, 1989), p. 21.
8. Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability', p. 21.
9. C. Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1989); M. Fortune, *Love Does No Harm* (New York: Continuum, 1995). C. Gusdorf, *Body, Sex and Pleasure* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994). E. Stuart, 'Just a Perfect Blend of Friendship', in R. Goss and A. Squires Strongheart (eds.), *Our Families, Our Values* (Haworth Press, forthcoming).
10. Lebacqz, 'Appropriate Vulnerability', p. 22.
11. 'Presbyterians and Human Sexuality', p. 9.
12. D. Soelle, *To Work and To Love: A Theology of Creation* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1984), p. 133.

13. J.B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 62.
14. R. Goss, *Jesus ACTED UP: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (San Francisco: Harper, San Francisco, 1993), p. 138.
15. N. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 175-76; J.M. Clark, *A Defiant Celebration* (Garland: Tanglewold Press, 1990), p. 74.; T. Homer, *Jonathan Loved David* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 40-346; R. Williams, *Just As I Am* (New York: Crown, 1992), p. 58; C. Glazer, 'Are Gay Unions Christian Covenants?', in S.B. Geiss and D.E. Messer (eds.), *Caught in the Crossfire*, pp. 144-45; E. Stuart, *Daring to Speak Love's Name: A Gay and Lesbian Prayer Book* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), pp. 21-22.
16. M. West, 'The Book of Ruth: An Example of Procreative Strategies for Queers', in *Our Families, Our Values* (Haworth Press, forthcoming, 1997).
17. See Ruth 3.9 and 4.16-17. A. Guindon, *The Sexual Creators* (New York: University of America Press, 1986), p. 180 and p. 201 n. 117.
18. Guindon, *The Sexual Creators*, p. 163.
19. Guindon, *The Sexual Creators*, pp. 168-69.
20. Guindon, *The Sexual Creators*, p. 176.
21. Guindon, *The Sexual Creators*, p. 179.
22. J.B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), p. 18.
23. Soelle, *To Work and To Love*, p. 134.
24. See R.R. Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: Harper, San Francisco, 1992); S. McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); C.J. Adams (ed.), *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (New York, Continuum, 1993); J.M. Clark, *Beyond Our Ghettos: Gay Theology in Ecological Perspective* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993).
25. C. Patterson, 'Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents', *Child Development* 63.5 (October 1992), p. 1026.
26. C. Bull, 'Till Death Do Us Part', *The Advocate* 643 (30 November, 1993), p. 47.
27. Patterson, 'Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents', p. 1036.

28. Guindon, *The Sexual Creators*, p. 182.
29. This point is argued by J. Oliver, 'Why Gay Marriages?', *Journal of Men's Studies* 4.3 (1996), pp. 209-224 and M.B. Alexander and I. Preston, *We Were Baptized Too* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995).
30. A.A. Squire Strongheart, 'Not Sick, Not Sorry' (unpublished manuscript), p. 11.