

Proposition 22 Teach-In Presentation
The Rev. Dr. George Regas
All Saints Church
January 23, 2000

Many of us have been the life-long recipients of double messages: Sex is dirty--Save it for someone you love! Yes, Christianity accepts and loves gay people--just as long as they don't live out their essential humanity.

My first point: Over these three hours together, I hope it has become abundantly clear that Christian and Jewish leaders -- deeply emersed in the sacred traditions of our faiths-- proclaim God loves and accepts gay and lesbian people just as they are. God's arms of gracious love are around homosexuals as they live out their humanity in sexual love.

Gay men and lesbians desire and need deep, lasting relationships just as much as I do as a straight man. Our sacred traditions do NOT deny to them genital expressions of that loving faithful commitment.

I know many same-sex couples up close and down deep. I've seen goodness and beauty in their love. The gay marriage, the gay kitchen, the gay bedroom are just as holy and beautiful as the are for loving, committed straight couples.

So here at this altar at All Saints Church over the past Nine years we have blessed same-sex unions, saying God Sees goodness and authenticity in their love and their intention to share this love for a lifetime. This puts a strong foundation under their commitment.

The Religious Right are the promoters of the Knight Initiative, waving their Bibles as the authority for their drive to protect traditional marriage. So What about the Bible!? The really serious problem for Christian people of the Book is not how to square homosexuality with certain Biblical passages that on the surface seem to condemn it-- but rather how to reconcile rejection, with the gracious, unconditional love of Christ.

My second point: Pivotal to the sacred traditions we share is the centrality and primacy of justice. Throughout this night we have heard echoing through all these marvelous presentations against the Knight Initiative the Hebrew Prophet Amos' momentous words:

"Let justice flow like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream."

People can build all kinds of cases against "gay marriage" because over homophobic culture shapes our opinions. But what is at stake here is not the desire to make everyone feel okay -- but to establish justice in the land. In a Washington cemetery, on the gravestone of a Vietnam veteran, it is written: "When I was in the military, the gave me a medal for killing two men, and discharged me for loving one."

Gay and lesbian people simply desire equal rights to civil marriage. No more. No less. The gay communities of America have continued to fight, not for "special rights," but for equal rights, long overdue them.

As a married man, I can't imagine not having access to my wife if she were critically ill in a hospital. Nothing would be more important than being at her side. However, I've seen gay men who have been in a committed relationship for years denied this privilege. The denial of that right is the ultimate indignity.

A vote against Prop. 22 is a vote for justice to reign. Justice means giving same-sex couples the same legal rights and protections enjoyed by heterosexual couples -- covering everything from joint tax returns to the ability to make medical decisions involving a spouse.

Jeffrey Amestoy, the Chief Justice of the Vermont court, said the extending of equal rights to homosexual couples in lasting relationships is simply, when all is said and done, "a recognition of our common humanity."

"Let Justice flow like a river...."

My third point: While I am greatly outraged by the deep pain our homophobic culture has inflicted on gays, still my faith calls me into this battle for justice armed with love.

Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu have shown that it is the temper and spirit of a movement that determines its victory. For both -- love was the plumb line by which everything is measured.

The Knight Initiative on the limitation of marriage is a vicious attack on our gay sisters and brothers. We must work tirelessly to defeat it on March 7th. We will be more successful, however, if we can emulate the witness of Dr. King and Archbishop Tutu. They refused to hate and found ways to love even those who oppressed them.

Desmond Tutu said he felt like bowing in respect before every human being who crossed his path -- black, brown, white -- because they are holy and precious vessels of the living God. Can you imagine that? In that cauldron of violence and hatred of apartheid -- Tutu saw in every person the precious worth they have because they are children of God.

It's that spirit that won the victory of justice in South Africa. It's what shines today as Archbishop Tutu said we now must liberate our gay brothers and sisters from the oppression of not allowing them to love each other with honor.

Martin Luther King knew healing racial divisions in America was hugely complex. But he said over and over again that if we could find ways to love "we could inject new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization. That is our overwhelming responsibility."

Pete Knight, you can offer your brutal initiative against gays -- but we will defeat you. We'll defeat you because we are going to work to the last minute to get people to the polls to stand for justice -- and as we go we will infuse into this state a new quality of love for all people. That will make glad the heart of God.