

FAMILIES COMPOSED OF openly gay or lesbian couples raising children are a relatively new reality, with the first instances happening only in the 1980s; their number has increased from year to year. Today, in western societies at least, they receive wide acceptance and are becoming common in the public imagination of film, television, and literature. This journal, committed as it is to theological reflection on all types of family life in interdisciplinary perspective, takes its first sustained consideration of the reality in this issue.

Same-sex parenting has been around for about 35 years, and there is a growing literature researching the nature of these families, the development of children in them, and the consequences for society. There is a certain population of children from these families who are now well into adulthood; they are the subject of a wide range of psychological and sociological studies. The growing acceptance of these “rainbow families” has occasioned a continual legal debate and a growing body of legal reflection. Not surprisingly, the most heated debates have been in the churches, both at the pastoral and administrative level and at the theological level.

As with all social and ethical developments, theological reflection is complex and concerns many factors. When lesbian and gay parents first began to raise children openly, they seemed to be clearly engaging in a new reality. For some Christian communities, particularly the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox, tradition weighs heavily against the acceptance of new practices. It seemed to many that such families, and the same-sex unions that they spring from, could not be reconciled with the tradition, the scriptures, or the concept of marriage and family. The arguments come quickly to mind: The church has never condoned or even imagined replacing the union of man and woman with non-gender-specific partners as the cornerstone of the family. The biblical idea of marriage clearly presumes a man and a woman. The divine warrant for the centrality and importance of the traditional family is built into biology: only a man and a woman can produce a child. Further, the church’s rejection of any sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage means that any child raised in such a household would be harmed by being raised in a context of deliberate sin. To these and other, rather immediate, objections, others from a broader social reflection were added, like the need for a child to have both a male and female parent in order to properly develop and the assertion that the future happiness of the child, indeed the happiness of the parents, requires a proper complementarity of male and female that only traditional marriage can bring.

Yet, serious theological reflection quickly showed that these conclusions are not as simple and clear as they may seem. A wealth of literature on the Bible show that it is not easy, or perhaps even proper, to draw a direct condemnation of today’s same-sex unions from its pages. Psychological studies of children in same-sex families overwhelmingly testify that these children are no worse off than

children of heterosexual families. The tradition is also complex. Consider, as a brief example, the supposed novelty of same-sex parenting in the tradition and the need for gender complementarity. While openly gay and lesbian parenting is relatively new, children have often been raised in same-sex households down through the centuries. Whenever single parenting occurs, there is single-sex parenting, and, further, these situations often become multi-generational parenting, and historically it is the women who step in to help the mother: the grandmother, the aunts, the sisters. Society and the church have always supported these usually all-female households, even if they may have seen them as less than ideal. The argument from tradition becomes even more complicated when we consider that the church has willingly sponsored same-sex adoption throughout its history in a different form: it was once common that a community of male monks or religious sisters would take in children to raise, whether these were orphaned or abandoned or simply entrusted to their care by the parents. This may seem far from gay or lesbian parenting, but it is nonetheless a situation of church-sponsored same-sex households where the church and the biological parents (if involved) wholeheartedly approved, with no misgivings regarding a lack of gender polarity. My point is not to make a detailed argument here, only to point to the complexity of the reality.

And so, we begin our engagement with the topic in this issue. Just as we do with other topics, our aim is not to argue for a position but to provide a forum where serious proposals can be voiced and debated. We first took up the topic in 2001 when we published a dialogue on same-sex unions: ANDRÉ VINGT-TROIS/SIEGRIED KEIL/WOLFGANG NETHÖFEL/MICHAEL HASPEL/GARETH MOORE: “Civil Same-Sex Unions: A Threat to Marriage?”, in: *INTAMS review* 7/1 (2001), 90-97. In 2006, FRANS J.H. VOSMAN offered a further reflection on the church’s response to same-sex couples in his “Can the Church Recognize Homosexual Couples in the Public Sphere?”, in: *INTAMS review* 12/1 (2006), 25-37. NENAD POLGAR examined how Catholic ethics can approach homosexual relations more fruitfully in “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Impasse in Sexual Ethics and the ‘Problem’ of Homosexuality”, in: *INTAMS review* 17/1 (2011), 69-83. The specific topic of this issue, same-sex families, was taken up in MARINA RUPP/ANDREA BUSCHNER: “How Does the Rainbow Find its Way into the Family?: Formation History and Daily Life of Rainbow Families in Germany”, in: *INTAMS review* 19/1 (2013), 70-95. The 2018 INTAMS symposium, “Troubled Love: Theology and Pastoral Care for All Families”, saw several of the presenters considering the issue of same-sex families, and the presentations published in our journal (*Marriage, Families & Spirituality* 24/2, 2018) reflect some of these concerns.

In this current issue, we provide a more concentrated reflection, sketching out some of the parameters and possibilities. An article by *Konrad Hilpert* opens the issue with an overview of the theological issues involved in homosexuality in general and how the Church has responded to them. We then present analyses of the two paths that lesbian or gay couples follow in having a child: adoption, considered by *Angelika Walser*, and medically assisted procreation, treated by *Elena Canzi* and *Eugenia Scabini*. Each of these authors presents some of the often-overlooked human dimensions and implications of each choice. Canzi and Scabini identify some serious issues that same-sex parenting must confront.

We then move to an overview of the legal progress from a European perspective by *Alina Tryfondiou*, who analyzes how European regulations can provide support for same-sex parenting. An article *Gerhard Marschütz* follows, offering a theological overview of the issues same-sex parenting, with a proposal for its acceptance by the church.

Since the reality at stake involves real families with real needs and desires, the discussion cannot proceed only in the abstract. It is our practice with every topic to give voice to the actual lived situation of people. For this reason, we have three testimonies of what it is like to parent as a same-sex couple. *Sarah Hagger-Holt* and *Rachel Hagger-Holt* offer a sampling of comments by people in the UK; *Kurt Denk* gives a personal account of his family in the US; and *Andrea Rubera* provides a perspective from Italy. We hope that the openness, generosity, and honesty of these women and men help to shed light on the real issues involved to spur deeper reflection.

Jochen Sautermeister concludes the issue by sketching out some avenues for further research. Our book review section in this issue is specifically dedicated to recent books on the related topics of sexualities, children, and marriage in society, followed by a list of books on same-sex unions that we have already reviewed in previous issues. We hope that this issue contributes to the wider debate in church and society and look forward to further considerations from many different perspectives in future issues.

DAVID DAWSON VASQUEZ,
Associate Editor