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**Reflection on Love--  
The Book of Ruth from a Sexual Minority Perspective**

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**Introduction**

Good afternoon! My name is Kazumi Usui. I am a member of the Shimura Baptist Church, and a volunteer staff member of this center. I am also a student of the Japan Bible College. I have been given the opportunity today to present my graduation thesis. This is where I have got to for now. I am aware that there is still much to study and I look forward to hearing your opinions.

First, let me explain why I wanted to write this thesis. For a long time, I have not been able to forgive myself for my sexuality. I cannot help using the word “forgive” to express my feelings. This is related to my consciousness of myself as a Christian and to my experience in the Church until now.

When I was 12 or 13 years old, I felt love for the first time. The person I loved was a woman. At that time I had already been informed that I had to love a “man” because I was a “woman”. I had misgivings about my situation and consulted books at the library. Finally, I found a book that addressed the matter. It said that “having feelings of love for a person of the same sex is something that happens frequently during adolescence. It is nothing to worry about, it is cured as you grow older.” \*1 Finding I would get better, my anxiety disappeared.

At the same time I encountered Christianity in a mission school that I entered at the age of 12. For the next six years in both school and church, I began to hear about homosexuality. It was asserted that homosexuality was “abnormal” and a “sin against creation.” While I kept telling myself that I would surely get better, I felt a sense of sin when I wanted to get more information. Even after several years my feelings were the same as ever.

I had felt love for women, but when I was about eighteen, I began to feel love for men too. Though my confusion deepened, I did not seek information. When I was 20 years old, I knew the words “lesbian” and “homosexual” \*2 and understood the meaning of them. But I could not find an appropriate word for my situation. “I am abnormal. No one loves in the way I do. I am not worthy to be a Christian. It is a sin...” Driven into a corner psychologically, there were times when I

contemplated suicide. At that time, the God of the Bible was far off in the distance for me. I managed to live, believing that my life was created by God, but I could not help feeling that it was also rejected by God. I could not express my feelings, though I had such intense feelings that I wanted to cry out. It is painful to have a sense of guilt in the delightful experience of love. I still had these deep feelings of guilt, even when I loved someone, established an intimate relationship with my female partner, or had a partner who understood me.

In my mid twenties, I finally found an appropriate word for my sexuality. It was “bisexual”. I felt a little relieved when I knew that I was not alone. But my belief that the God of the Bible and the Church condemned such sexuality was not changed.

Shortly afterwards, I began to learn about feminist theology and my view of the Bible changed completely. From then on, I began to think about my sexuality and to try to describe it. I learned that services were held by a gay/bisexual liturgy group somewhere in Tokyo, far from Fukuoka where I lived at that time. In Jan. 2004, I met Rev. Aika Taira, a representative of this group, in a workshop held by the Baptist Church. He said, “We were created by God. God created a diversity of sexuality.”

His words were indeed “good news” to me. Later, for various reasons, I moved to Tokyo. Now I am a member of this group, involved in planning its events. It feels strange to me that I should be here.

I decided to treat the Book of Ruth in this article mainly for the reason suggested earlier. I can read similarities to my sexuality in the relationship between Ruth and Naomi as well as in the relationship between Ruth and Boaz. Thus, I would like to show that the sexuality of Ruth and her way of loving as well as diversity of sexuality are approved of in the canon.

Of course I don't support the theological theory that canon is “the Word of God”. But Christianity has accepted both the Hebrew Bible which contains the description of Ruth's sexuality and the Christian Testament which regards Ruth as an ancestor of Jesus as its “canon”. In this same canon, there are words which have been interpreted as condemnation of sexual minorities. Therefore, a lot of people from sexual minorities who are involved (or who had been involved) in Christianity have suffered. I would like to take part of the blame on myself as a student studying Christian theology. I hope that I will form better relationships with sexual minorities in the Churches through my activities. Churches and the “good news” in them should be changed. Then I will be able to know that “I” and “we” are approved by God.

### **Prologue: Making a Question**

This paper is written from an academic viewpoint concerning the two questions below.

1) Are there “canonical” documents that approve of homosexuality?

“Homosexuality is a sin, because the Bible speaks of it as a sin.” Many who love or who have loved people of the same sex were injured, excluded, and treated unfairly as a result of the uncontested acceptance by the Churches of these kinds of statements. Some people left their Churches, others developed low self esteem about themselves, and others remain in their churches though they are ill-treated by them. Do all canonical documents disapprove of homosexual love and homosexual intercourse and speak of them as sinful? Are there actually no documents that approve of homosexual

love and homosexual intercourse in the canon?

2) Are there only homosexuals and heterosexuals in canonical documents?

When a person shows some tendency toward homosexuality, she/he is regarded as a person who loves only people of the same sex. Even if it emerges that the person had heterosexual intercourse or loved people of the other sex, such a fact is interpreted as a “camouflage” or ignored altogether. As a result, we are exposed to the theory that there are “heterosexuals and a few homosexuals” in this world. With respect to this matter, canonical documents endorse this view with similar views being expressed in commentaries, even in those commentaries which are in other ways radical. But is it really right?

I chose the Book of Ruth as a document appropriate to examining the two queries above. I would like to confirm my views below through a careful reading of the Book of Ruth.

I aim to make clear that diversity of sexuality including homosexuality is described with approval in canonical documents.

I treat the Book of Ruth as a canonical document which depicts bisexuality and shows the existence of bisexuals, a group who are apt to be invisible within sexual minorities.

I seek to show that part of the grace and blessing of God's creation is the richness and diversity of sexuality.

## **1. My Reading of the Book of Ruth From the Viewpoint of a Bisexual**

1) What is sexuality?

We cannot give a clear definition of the term 'sexuality'. The same may be said of other terms relating to sexuality. For this term was originally “imported” from English together with its concept, a concept which has no root in Japanese. Moreover, it is only a short time since the term was imported and it is still difficult to treat sexuality as an object of study or examination in such a social situation. As well as this, the term refers to both a particular phenomenon and wide-ranging phenomena. We must also remember that there are regional disparities in Japan. In short, “sexuality” is not yet established as a common word.\*3

Below is a tentative definition of sexuality which I give in the light of the restrictions outlined above. Sexuality is one's sexual style which is deeply connected to one's way of life. In other words, it refers to “sex of one's individuality”, “sex of one's choice”, “sex on reconsideration” and so on.

As it is concerned with not only the phenomenon itself but also one's way of thinking, it is influenced by the society and the cultural situation in which one lives.

2) How do we understand the place of bisexuality?

Bisexuality is a form of sexual orientation. Both women and men are bisexuals. It is a self-awareness of one's sexual orientation that feels affection and desire spiritually, physically and sexually for both sexes. There are differences among individuals with regard to what they focus on or which

sex is more attractive to them.

The definitions of bisexuality reflect various positions. Various alternative words and additional words are used so that we may explain bisexuality adequately.\*4 “ Pansexual/omnisexual ” is one such word. Those who take the position that every gender should be respected prefer to use this word.

I guess that even a person who would self-identify as a pansexual would, in most cases, describe her or himself as a bisexual since the word bisexual is known more generally and is a significant word in identity politics.\*5

Bisexuality is an independent sexual orientation in itself, but sometimes it is regarded as “ a mixture of homosexuality and heterosexuality ” or “ a state which includes a sexual orientation to unisexuality, \*6 such as homosexuality or heterosexuality ” . A book for teenagers, published recently, said that “ most people who have experienced bisexuality finally settle down to either gay or straight relationships ” .\*7 The reason why such a misunderstanding arises is that bisexuals are invisible in the present situation with the result that there is little opportunity to hear the views of bisexuals themselves.

This situation is produced by several factors, the main one being that we live in a society which forces us to be heterosexual. This is clear if we look at the family registration system whereby marriage affords the achievement and protection of certain rights. However marriage, as regulated by civil law, is allowed only between two individuals of different sexes, marital relations are legally recognized only in the case where individuals are recorded as 'man' and 'wife' on the family register. If individuals do not register their marriage, their relations are basically considered to be outside the law.

Those who are unmarried in such a situation are sure to be under social pressure to do so. And it would be difficult for them to gain social standing without it. Thus, most bisexuals do not come-out about their sexuality but rather make heterosexual marriages and keep their bisexuality concealed. This society, which enforces heterosexuality, leads to discrimination against homosexuals with bisexuals being similarly discriminated against. Moreover, another result of this discrimination arises; the discrimination by homosexuals against bisexuals. This discrimination comes from the attitude that those who love someone of the opposite sex should live within heterosexual society. But it might also be a misunderstanding caused by the sufferings of homosexuals living in a society which enforces heterosexuality.

The second reason is that the twofold classification of “ homosexual ” and “ heterosexual ” is a misconception. Those who recognize that there are people who love other people of the same sex also have this kind of misconception in this society today. Awareness concerning the sexuality of bisexuals itself is fundamentally affected by this misconception. According to the Kinsey Report, 10 percent of the population is heterosexual, another 10 percent is homosexual, and the remaining 80 percent is bisexual. \*8 Though the Kinsey Report is problematic, we should recognize that the percentage of bisexuals is higher than the percentage of unisexuality. While bisexuals tend to be regarded as heterosexuals when they have relationships with persons of the opposite sex, they tend to be regarded as homosexuals when having relationships with persons of the same sex. The sexuality of both heterosexuals and homosexuals is recognized in regard to their sexual orientation based on their awareness and both can join their chosen community even if they are not in a relationship with a regular partner. But sometimes bisexuals cannot join sexual minority society and will distance

themselves from such a society, especially when they are in a relationship with a person of the opposite sex. There is a high probability that they are excluded from sexual minority society due to being in a relationship with a person of the opposite sex at that time. Such a situation of being between “two societies” causes suffering to bisexuals. Thus, they tend to be open about their relationship with their partners when they have opposite sex partners, while they tend to conceal their relationship with their partners when they have same sex partners. In this society today it is easier for them to live in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, and as a result, they are apt to conceal their own bisexuality in their life. Moreover, once a person is recognized as someone who loves persons of the same sex, she/he is regarded as “homosexual”. Even if she/he also has a close relationship with a person of the opposite sex, their relationship is apt to be regarded as a false relationship. This misconception also arises from the mistaken idea that sexuality is classified into two groups, “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality”.

Another point arising from this misconception, is that “homosexual”, especially “male homosexual” is regarded as the representative or the whole of what it is to be a sexual minority.\*9 For example, until two years ago, the sexual minorities parade in Tokyo was called “Tokyo Lesbian and Gay Parade” \*10. Recent bills presented to the synod of United Church of Christ in Japan are mostly titled “... of sexual minorities, that is, homosexuals” . \*11 Though such expressions are as careless as the phrases “human beings, that is, males” or “animals, that is, humans”, this has not been widely criticized even within sexual minority society.\*12

Under the present situation, bisexuals suffer as a minority, which as a group have to conceal their sexuality and who are excluded even from sexual minority society.

### 3) My viewpoint in reading the Book of Ruth\*13

As I mentioned above, the concept of sexuality has developed in recent years. Since the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that sexual orientation is not a disease, studies about sexuality have made rapid progress in the fields of the humanities and social sciences and the voices of sexual minorities have been heard. Therefore, we cannot proceed as though the understanding of sexual relationships in the ancient Near Eastern world, including Israel, is the same as our understanding today. Ancient people who had homosexual relationships do not necessarily have the same “sexuality” as modern people who love persons of the same sex.\*14 For this reason, we should not directly apply modern ideas of sexual orientation like “homosexuality” and “bisexuality” in reading the Book of Ruth, since such a reading would be anachronistic. On the basis of this way of thinking, I will examine how Ruth conducts herself within the context of her own time. Finally I would like argue for a possible reading of the Book of Ruth as describing a ‘diversity of sexuality’.

## **2. The Book of Ruth in the Hebrew Bible**

### 1) About the Book of Ruth

It is said that the narrative of the Book of Ruth is made up of two separate “family narratives” \*15; the narrative of Ruth and the narrative of Naomi. Opinion about the date of writing is divided and

ranges from as early as 10 B.C.E. to as late as 5 B.C.E. But I think the determination of the date is not so important. I think it is appropriate, however, that we consider the the long process by which traditions changed under the influence of both the social and historical background and also the reaction to such change.\*16 In time, oral traditions were changed to written texts, and then edited. It is impossible to identify the author when we cannot determine the date of writing. Though originally in the religion of Israel,\*17 Samuel has been regarded as the author, it is not historically probable. There is a hypothesis that, in the age of oral traditions, the author or reciters were women. Though it is impossible to confirm this hypothesis now, I would not like to eliminate it as a possibility.

## 2) The implications of the Book of Ruth in Christianity

This narrative has been read and received in various ways. Interpretations vary considerably according to social (or personal) contexts.

One of the most traditional interpretations is that it is the narrative of a harmonious relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law. In this interpretation, which praises the “ virtue ” of a woman serving her mother-in-law even after her husband ’ s death, Ruth is shown as a paragon and an example to follow. Such an interpretation is liable to be found in Asian cultures in particular. Another traditional interpretation is related to the conversion of the Gentiles. As a result of these two interpretations, Ruth is regarded as a woman highly esteemed by God, who appears in the family tree of David and Jesus. Considering these traditional interpretations to be oppressive, some Asian women seek to read this narrative in their own words and from their own situations. Various fruitful interpretations were produced in the struggle. One of them is to read this as a narrative of women's solidarity. It interprets their relationship as one of sisterhood, from the viewpoint that two women might adapt to the local community by sharing wisdom and living together in order to survive.

As I mentioned above, we are inevitably influenced by the society we live in. It is important when we hear an interpretation for the first time, that we know who and where it comes from as well as what kind of interpretation it is, for its influence may continue for a long time. We should keep in mind that we can never be “ objective ” or “ neutral ” .

### **3. The exegesis of the Book of Ruth Featuring Ruth ’ s demonstration of affection**

#### 1) Naomi ’ s values, Orpah ’ s loyalty, Ruth ’ s passion (1: 14-17)

First, we should pay attention to the reactions of Orpah and Ruth to Naomi ’ s advice. We suppose that Orpah and Ruth have to follow Naomi ’ s advice, for she is the mother of their husbands. If the subjects of “ cried ” in v.14 were only Orpah and Ruth, we can surmise that Naomi wanted to go back home alone. \*18 Orpah followed her advice. We can presume that Orpah is more loyal to Naomi with regard to her words, even if those words do not always fully express her feelings.

In v.8, Naomi advises Orpah and Ruth to return to the “ home of your mothers ” . The word which means home in Hebrew is “ home of your father ” in most cases and the expression “ home of your mother ” appears only 4 times in the Hebrew Bible including here.\*19 As all of them are used in

relation to marriage or sexual relations, we can guess that Naomi's use of this expression shows her desire for her two daughters-in-law to be happy through marriage. \*20 Naomi thought that a woman's value, happiness and security depended on "marriage with a man and having sons". This view was right according to the values at that time and she wanted Orpah and Ruth to be happy within the framework of her values. Orpah accepted Ruth's view. In brief, Orpah was an obedient daughter-in-law to Naomi. On the other hand, Ruth didn't follow Naomi's advice. Ruth was not an obedient daughter-in-law to Naomi. Some think that Ruth was an obedient daughter-in-law and Orpah a disobedient daughter-in-law because Ruth didn't leave Naomi, but such an interpretation is not acceptable. Ruth was, so to speak, having her own way.

Others interpret v.16 as a confession of faith by a convert and explain that Ruth wanted to be part of the people of Naomi's God. But it is improbable that she intended to be accepted as a convert in light of the strong inclination of Israelites to exclude Moabites. \*21 Ruth was called a "Moabite woman" until she bore a son. Ruth's words in v.16 are not words of "conversion". It is essential for her to announce that she belongs to their God and community in order to ensure that she will not bring a Moabite god into, and so will not be a threat to, that community. \*22 Conversion is not the reason for Ruth's action, rather, it is necessary for her purpose of rejecting Naomi's advice. The word Ruth uses here is passionate and fierce; Ruth "chose" Naomi.

## 2) Naomi's Directions and Ruth's Action (3: 1-14)

When the end of the harvest was drawing near, \*23 Naomi gave up on gleaning which had been a temporary means of living and began to look for a more secure livelihood. Naomi, on her own initiative, told Ruth to take the following action in relation to Boaz, saying to her: "Wash yourself, put on some perfume, and get dressed in your cloak." Though there are various opinions on the implication of this, in any case it indicates a considerably special situation in ancient times. \*24 I think this situation is parallel with the case of Israelite wedding preparations. \*25 That is, what Naomi directs Ruth to do, is a preparation for her engagement or marriage and strangely enough, Ruth obediently follows her directions. Though previously she had firmly resisted Naomi's advice, she was very obedient here. After this, Naomi's words clearly explain the purport of what she is saying; "feet" in v.4 is a euphemism for sexual organs. Naomi tells her to bare them.

This way of storytelling reminds the audience of various scenes in the Hebrew Bible. \*26 Ruth goes to Boaz's sleeping place and without following Naomi's instructions, tells him what she wants. (In a sense, it is just like Ruth.) While Boaz asks God to bless her, Ruth asks Boaz himself to bless her and proposes marriage to him. Ruth chooses to tell Boaz what to do instead of waiting for his direction.

In v.9, the expression, "Please spread your wings over your servant", can be interpreted to mean "Please spread the skirt of your coat". It is a metaphor for marriage. \*27 And the Hebrew word (amah) used by Ruth here is different from the word which was previously used for "servant". This word has a nuance which means "a woman who can marry a man, who is not a slave" or "a woman who can be one's marriage partner". That is, Ruth is, again, using her own words and speaking her mind here.

As a result, her action draws the following words from Boaz: "I will do everything you ask... you

are a fine woman ” (v.11). Boaz recognizes Ruth as an equal partner who can conduct negotiations, debate, and communicate well.

After this, the text does not fully develop the plot of this narrative, but we can imagine what the sequel might be. For example, the audience (or the reader) can imagine that Ruth and Boaz have intercourse that night, for the text refers to “ feet ” particularly at the end of Boaz ’ s words. We can certainly imagine that Ruth and Boaz at least started to have a close relationship on that day, that Boaz made her “ his own ” , that Ruth told him what she wanted and that her wishes were granted.

### 3) From a private narrative to a public narrative (4: 11-22)

In the last chapter, chapter 4, the narrative begins at the town gate which is a place for official matters, and closes with the presentation of the ancestors of King David whose achievements are featured many times in the Hebrew Bible. The narrative of three women, Naomi, Orpah and Ruth, was private at first, but is now the public narrative of a society.

The words of the leaders and the others (v. 11-12) express the Israelite values of marriage, and supposedly derive from old words of congratulations on marriage. \*28 “ To enter ” (v. 13) means sexual intercourse in Hebrew. Here what we see is Ruth and Boaz’s public marriage.

Though we can interpret “ redeemer ” (v.17 a grandson ...to take care of you in v.14 ?) as Jahweh or Boaz, we interpret it as “ a boy ” who was born of Ruth, for the expression “ who will bring new life to you ” (v. 19 v.15) is used for depicting “ a boy ” though it is usually used for depicting Jahweh. \*29 Ruth was designated “ the Moabite woman ” until she gave birth to “ a boy ” . We suppose that Ruth was received by the community of Israel at that point in time owing to her giving birth to a boy.

Vv.11-12 reminds us of the narrative of Tamar who became a widow and of Tamar's “ father-in-law ” . \*30 It hints that the people in the town knew of the previous relationship between Ruth and Boaz. There are a lot of similarities between the Book of Ruth and the narrative of Tamar \*31, and the Book of Ruth as a whole alludes to that narrative.

## 4. Ruth ’ s situation and her sexuality

### 1) Ruth and Naomi

A little while ago, I said that Ruth was passionate in her choice of Naomi. My argument is as follows. First, there is the combination of the expressions “ held onto her ” in 1: 14 and “ leave you ” in 1: 16. The same combination is used to express the first marriage between a man and a woman in Genesis. \*32

Ruth's words are recognized as a confession showing a close relationship that is equal to or above marriage. Even theologians such as Old and Fuerst recognize this. \*33 Phyllis Trible states as follows.

“ A young woman has committed herself to the life of an old woman rather than to the search for a husband, and she has made this commitment not ‘ until death us do part ’ but beyond death. One female has chosen another female in a world where life depends upon men. This is no more radical



decision in all the memories of Israel. ” \*34

Elements such as “ marriage ” and “ eros ” tend to be ignored in this “ confession ” of Ruth, for it is made by a woman to a woman. But this interpretation has been influenced by the ideas of the social situation which produced it. We can read Ruth ’ s confession as a confession which includes both eros and marital relationship, if we substitute a man for Naomi. At the very least, we cannot eliminate the possibility that Ruth’s confession to Naomi includes a suggestion of marriage and eros.

Moreover, we can also refer to the description in chapter 4 which shows a close relationship between Ruth and Naomi. The word “ a child (y eledh) ” is used here, though the word “ a son (ben) ” is usually used. If we pay attention to this usage, we can read as follows: the value of Obed for Naomi is not the value of “ a son ” as a successor of her family. For Naomi the value of Obed is as “ a child ” , and because of this, she holds the child in her arms tenderly. Thus, we see Naomi accepting Ruth ’ s child as her own. If we were to see “ a man ” tenderly holding the child of a woman he loves in his arms, we would suppose that he stands in an intimate relationship with the mother. I think it is necessary to give up heterosexuality here just for a little while. \*35

## 2) Ruth and Boaz

It is not certain that there is “ love ” , as the modern reader might imagine it, between Ruth and Boaz. Both Ruth and Naomi had to survive in their time and society. Therefore, we can suppose that Ruth thought the surest way to live was to marry Boaz who was rich. This way of thinking was not particularly special at that time and it was a possible way to survive in a society in which the two women were unable to make a living. And it was not unnatural for Boaz to think that his marriage to Ruth was advantageous. At least, the idea that marriage at that time was not based on love is not beyond the imagination of modern readers.

However, we can see Ruth and Boaz’s feelings for each other through their conversations and certain incidents in the narrative. For example, in chapter 2, Boaz takes particular notice of Ruth, and asks about her family, when he sees her in a group of women. And he repeatedly shows favor to her afterwards. Ruth purposefully shares a bed with Boaz and tells him her thoughts, in her own words, disregarding Naomi ’ s instructions. Boaz then says to her, “ Jahweh bless you. You are showing even greater family loyalty in what you are doing now than in what you did for your mother-in-law...I will do everything you ask. ” After that, Boaz puts his brain to work and employs a strategy to marry Ruth legally. In doing this, we see nothing other than his eagerness to marry Ruth. Boaz recognized that he can interact emotionally with Ruth as an equal partner, so he speaks to her of his emotions, freely and without restraint. In this way, we can see that as well as the traditional marital relations between Ruth and Boaz, there was also an emotional relationship.

## 3) Ruth's Position

With both Naomi and Boaz?

Did Ruth have sexual relations with both Naomi and Boaz? I suppose some hold the view that it would be dishonest of her to do so. Moreover, it may promote a misconception about bisexuals.\* 36 If

we assume that Ruth did have sexual relations with both Naomi and Boaz, it is necessary to consider whether this is dishonest or not, ( though it is evident that we cannot extrapolate from this that all bisexuals behave like this). \*37 Further, as I mentioned above, it is anachronistic to try to understand Ruth ' s situation in the light of ideas about modern sexuality. Moreover, seeing what and when things happened is not clear from the narrative so we cannot know whether or not Ruth ' s affection for Naomi and Boaz occurred at the same time. On the contrary there is a strong possibility that Ruth ' s affection for each of them was not simultaneous. Though we can imagine how she felt toward each of them from the text, we cannot demonstrate it clearly. But we can see that Ruth had affectionate relations with both Naomi and Boaz which may have been passionate and erotic. What we cannot know is whether or not these relations were simultaneous or not.

The text shows clearly that Ruth and Boaz had sexual relations including intercourse. But we should reserve judgment on whether the relationship between Ruth and Naomi was a sexual one which included intercourse. We must also reserve judgement on the process of the development of Ruth's relationship with Naomi, though we have certainly found that Ruth's love for Naomi is an erotic love. Naturally, the degree of closeness does not depend on the presence or absence of sexual intercourse.

I think that the expression of one ' s erotic feelings, will depend on the degree of closeness to one ' s partner and that in certain circumstances, one ' s feelings are not necessary expressed completely. I find that the relationship between Ruth and Boaz and the relationship between Ruth and Naomi are formed in accordance with their feelings which differ in degree of closeness.

Is marriage supreme love?

Ruth married Boaz, but this does not clarify for us her feelings. In our time, we embrace an ideology that " marriage " is the supreme expression of love, but it is only an ideology or one choice of values.

Though we may assume or be convinced that we, ourselves, make a choice between what we want to reveal and what we want to conceal in our life, it is not true. In fact, we are not free from the values of our society and, in numerous cases, we are unconscious of many things forced on us by society. Ruth chose marriage with Boaz, but marriage is not the supreme expression of love, not only in the ancient world but also in the present day.

## **Conclusion what is 'to love'?**

### 1) For Ruth

As I mentioned above, this is a description of Ruth ' s way of life which admits of diverse readings. We can read in the text that Ruth had feelings of sexual love for both Naomi and Boaz. And we can therefore infer that Ruth ' s love is not restricted to persons of the same sex or to persons of the opposite sex. Ruth tried to live her life, devoting herself heart and soul to her partners, regardless of their sex, even though her feelings towards them differed in depth and strength. The Hebrew Bible connects Ruth and her child to David, and the Christian Testament connects them to Jesus. We can suppose therefore that instead of rejecting Ruth's sexuality, they depict it positively.

Ruth, in her relationship with others, follows the impulses, not of others ' minds but of her own.

Though it was common sense, at that time, to follow the directions of her husband ' s mother, Ruth did not follow Naomi ' s directions to return to her homeland. Also, as the text implies, she had relations with Boaz, which was also not within Naomi's instructions. It may safely be said that Ruth always chose to speak her mind frankly to others so that her views might be valued by others and showing that she valued others ' ways of life. Through this, we can understand Ruth ' s way of living and loving as a person created and enriched by God to love without regard to sex and without being fettered by the opinions of the time.

## 2) For me/us

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza writes about love as follows.

“ Love does not accept and endure inequality, injustice, violence, abuse, and dehumanization. Love is dangerous if it is not an expression of self-esteem, respect, dignity, independence, and self-determination. ... Love is nothing without the hope that sustains us in the political struggle for the well-being of everyone. ” \*38

Fiorenza's statement gives me encouragement and a feeling of power. It is love when we seek self-esteem, respect, dignity, independence, and self-determination amid inequality, violence, abuse, and dehumanization. It is love when we continue to hope for all our well-being together.

The Book of Ruth also gave me similar encouragement. Ruth ' s way of life told me that we, bisexuals who love both women and men, are also part of God's Creation, and that our way of life is affirmed. It also taught me that love is indeed about forming relationships with one ' s partner, respecting one ' s own mind and communicating with one another as equals.

Encouraged by Ruth ' s way of life, I would like to talk about these matters in my own words; using my own words to make them my own. I would like to share these matters with the people around me, to fulfill my responsibility as a student of theology who has an opportunity to study and learn. Ruth ' s way of life has taught me is that there is a way to make this a world in which everyone, whether one is a sexual minority or not, can live freely and fruitfully, following one's own rules of life.



I have presented this paper to the best of my ability, though I feel it is insufficient because of limitations of time and my academic achievement at present. There is a diversity of sexuality in this world because God created us as such. But this view is not accepted in this society and a lot of people suffer. I want to tackle this challenge, working together, until discrimination against sexual minorities is eliminated from this world and a society is realized in which everyone, without regard to sexuality, is permitted to choose one ' s own way of life. For me, writing this paper is a step in undertaking this challenge.

From now, I would like to keep moving forward, with my community around me, taking an occasional rest, holding on to the hope that our ideal might be realized.

Notes

- \*1 I cannot remember the title of this book now. However, it might have been a common way of thinking at that time, for I know many other people who also read this kind of explanation.
- \*2 These are the only words that I knew at this point of time, as I mention in my paper. These days, in most cases, the word “ gay ” is used to avoid using the disparaging term “ homo ”. The word “ homosexual ” is today recognized as the word which refers to, not only male homosexuals, but also homosexuals in general.
- \*3 In these past 20 years, there has been a steady increase of information through the spread of the internet and the increase of books originally written in Japanese, as well as through various other media such as comics. I hope that this will lead to the construction of a common language in future.
- \*4 However, these new words have not yet been widely recognized in society.
- \*5 I think this word is close to my position in regard to my own sexual self-recognition.
- \*6 This word refers to a sexual orientation which is limited to either the same sex or to the opposite sex.
- \*7 ジェーン・パヴァネル 『セックス・ブック: 10代からの心と体の辞典』 富永星訳、河出書房新社、2008年、p286。  
(Jane Pavanel, The Sex Book, 2001)
- \*8 Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, 1948; Sexual Behavior in Human Female, 1953.
- \*9 General recognition of “ transgender/transsexual ” people has been growing as the phrase “ gender identity disorder ” has become more recognized in recent years. There are however a number of different views as to how to understand this term.
- \*10 It was changed in 2007 to “ Tokyo Pride Parade ”.
- \*11 Kanagawa Diocese and Higashichugoku Diocese of United Church of Christ in Japan are putting forward propositions and requests under this title.
- \*12 In past years using expressions like this in presentations and lectures left me with an uncomfortable feeling that I was unable to identify the cause of. This sort of language was common usage then.
- \*13 山口里子(Satoko Yamaguchi)、 『虹は私たちの間に』、新教出版社、p181-183.
- \*14 Sexual intercourse was not necessarily the climax of personal affection. Marriages were made regardless of affection, for reasons of political and social power or possession and reproduction. In relations between male homosexual love and intercourse, it was supposed that one of the couple played the role of the “ female ”. This was considered to be shameful behavior. And the other was greatly blamed for having made his partner play such a role (Leviticus 18: 22). Cf. Yamaguchi, 2008, p181.
- \*15 It is called a “ saga ”.
- \*16 Yamaguchi, 2008, p193.
- \*17 That is, the religion of Israel before the separation into Judaism and Christianity.
- \*18 K・D・サーケンフェルド、 『現代聖書注解 ルツ記』 矢野和江訳、日本基督教団出版局、2001年、p59。  
Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, Ruth (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching) (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 30.
- \*19 Genesis 24: 28; Song of Songs 3: 4; 8: 2.
- \*20 荒井英子(Eiko Arai) 「ルツ記」、木田献一監修 『新共同訳 旧約聖書略解』日本基督教団出版局、2001年、p314.
- \*21 Sakenfeld, 2001, p48.
- \*22 Arai, 2001, p315.
- \*23 This refers to the harvest of barley and wheat. After this, a story about the winnowing of barley is told. It was not a

particularly confusing situation for the audience, for it was the custom from ancient times to winnow barley after the harvest of all the other grains. Sakenfeld, 2001, p101.

\*24 Supposedly, it was not unusual to wash one's body in a dry climate or to put on perfume though it was impractical, especially for a poor person right after their return from abroad. Sakenfeld says that the word "anoint" here is a hint to "consecration". (Sakenfeld, 54.) Bathing was probably not an everyday or even weekly practice in ancient Israel, and the use of oil (implied by the choice of the Hebrew verb "anoint"), in such a non-utilitarian way as bodily anointing would surely have been even less frequent. So the introductory instructions for personal preparation already give Ruth a clue that Naomi has something unusual in mind. Cf. Sakenfeld, 2001, p101.)

\*25 Ezekiel 16: 9-12.

\*26 It reminds us of the narrative of Gen. 29: 21-30. "The threshing floor" is associated with extramarital intercourse (Hos. 9: 1), and Boaz's condition (that he had finished drinking) suggests the sexual intercourse of the drunken Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19: 30-38). Ruth's designation as "the Moabite" can easily awaken such an association, since the Moabites were seen as the descendants of these deeds. Ruth is not accepted as a member of the community of Israel. (Cf. Levine, 1998, p150. Arai, 2001, p316)

"First, they are reminiscent of the trickery depicted in Gen. 29: 21-30, with Naomi playing the role of Laban, Ruth that of Leah (see 4: 11), and Boaz that of Jacob. Second, the threshing floor is associated with extramarital sexual activity (see Hos. 9: 1). Finally, Boaz's condition ("When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contended mood," 3: 7) recalls the incestuous relationship between the drunken Lot and his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38). Ruth the Moabite, the descendant of this union, is typecast." (Cf. Amy-Jill Levine, "Ruth," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsome & Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 82.

\*27 Deuteronomy 23: 1; Ezekiel 16: 8.

\*28 月本昭男(Akio Tsukimoto)、2005年、p553。

\*29 Psalms 23: 3 etc.

\*30 Genesis 38.

\*31 Levine, 1998, p153. (1992, p83.)

\*32 Genesis 2: 24; Yamaguchi, 2008, p198-199.

\*33 A・G・オールド「ルツ記」『デイリースタディーバイブル ヨシュア記・士師記・ルツ記』小野功生訳、新教出版社、1987年、p433。(A. G. Old, *The Daily Study Bible*) W・J・フュースト「ルツ記」『ケンブリッジ聖書注解 11』高尾哲訳、1981年、p18。(W. J. Fuerst, *Cambridge Bible Commentary*)

\*34 フィリス・トリブル『神と人間性の修辞学』河野信子訳、ヨルダン社、1989年、p252。Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 73.

\*35 Yamaguchi, 2008, p210.

\*36 One of several misconceptions about bisexuality is that bisexuals are in love relationships with members of both sexes at the same time. Though some bisexuals are, others are not. The same may be said of heterosexuals and homosexuals; some of them are in love relationships with more than one person at one time, while others are involved with only one person.

\*37 Similarly, the fact that the first brother who appeared in the Bible killed his younger brother doesn't mean that all brothers kill their younger brothers.

\*38 エリザベス・シュスラー・フィオレンツァ(Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza)「女/性たちに対する暴力と、愛の宣言」吉谷かおる訳『知恵なる神の開かれた家』山口里子他訳、新教出版社。

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