

Natural law not as simple as male and female

By Carl McDaniel

The Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire elects a gay bishop. The Vatican declares, "Marriage is holy, while homosexual acts go against the natural moral law."

Harvey Milk High School, the first public high school for gay and transgender students, opens this fall in New York City.

All 50 states bar same-sex marriage, yet the Massachusetts Supreme Court considers a suit over denial of marriage licenses to seven same-sex couples.

George W. Bush announces, "I believe a marriage is between a man and a woman, and I think we ought to codify that one way or the other."

What is going on here? For some, Leviticus 20:13, along with half a dozen other Biblical passages, defines the issue: "If a man has intercourse with a man as with a woman, they both commit an abomination."

At the same time, Leviticus 11:4-23 states that you are not to eat pig, anything from the water that does not have fins and scales, and a member of other things. And Leviticus 19:19 instructs, "You shall not put on a garment woven with two kinds of yarn."

How does a culture choose appropriate behaviors? The simple answer is experience and knowledge. We know today's shellfish and pork are safe to eat. We wear so many clothes made of two kinds of "yarn" that if they disappeared suddenly, it would be an international nudist event.

But what about homosexuality and same-sex marriages among consenting adults? The Bible's origins are in peoples who understood the world much as the Greek scholars Plato and Aristotle did. These scholars imagined the world consisting of types: triangles, spheres, red birds, dogs, male and female. They believed there was a perfect form for each type, and all others were flawed. This typological worldview was foundational for Western culture. It informed a wide range of understandings, and thereby led to the codification of culturally accepted behaviors.

However, we have learned, especially in biology, that we do not have types but, rather, populations. The perfect dog does not exist. Dogs show immense diversity, even among particular breeds like poodles and German shepherds. The same is true for male and female.

In mammalian development, the female pattern is intrinsic. So, contrary to Biblical text, Eve is not from Adam's rib. The male pattern is derived and dependent upon exposure to male hormones during embryo formation.

Dairy farmers have long noted evidence of this hormonal influence. A

Freemartin is a sterile cow that developed in utero too close to a male fetus, with her development altered toward the male pattern by exposure to male hormones.

A mouse that is genetically female can be made to be morphologically and behaviorally similar to a male, and vice versa, just by altering hormonal exposure during early development.

In mammals, including humans, there are not two types, female and male. Rather, we have a highly diverse population that ranges from “typical” female to “typical” male, with myriad variations in all of the morphology and behavior associated with femaleness and maleness.

Some may wish to deny the facts, but the rules of nature apply despite our beliefs or disdain for what is. A society and its institutions provide for its members and endure to the extent that they have the capacity to embrace new understandings and then modify beliefs and conduct accordingly.

In the first half of the 20th century, when genetics was a new science, Russian politicians sided with the pseudoscience of Trofim Lysenko. Lysenko’s poorly designed and inappropriately analyzed agricultural experiments supported the state’s political ideology that an individual’s traits were wholly controlled by environmental influences. Geneticists were removed from their positions, and for about two decades, genetics was a clandestine activity in Russian science.

Agricultural failure after agriculture failure ensued, and untold millions starved. When a society operates upon an ideology that is demonstrably false, some of its members do poorly.

And so it has been for gays and lesbians. The evidence is clear and indisputable to anyone who cares to consider it. Nature did not create two types, male and female: Human maleness and femaleness abound with diversity that deserves recognition and respect.

Striving for change in strongly held beliefs is what is happening in our nation and around the world. We are mustering the courage and the wisdom to accept the understandings biological knowledge has given us and to act on them. Our laws are being rewritten for the benefit of all.

Millions of people in the United States may be given the long-denied opportunity to publicly have complete and whole relations with each other and society. When it happens, we should all rejoice.

After all, responsible and respectful relations within a couple and with society are what really matter, not the sexual orientation of the couple.

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