

Ernstraud Magazine

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happiness sharing as a way to peace

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§1 The Gender Binary Is a False Construct Why secular same-sex marriage is a fundamental human right

What it is

Can you define male and female unambiguously? Do human variations constitute exceptions to your category definitions? Do you succumb to a strict binary model of gender?

Traditionally humans have been regarded as male or female according to external physical characteristics visible at birth: sex organs. Contemporary science has progressed far beyond this simplistic method of defining gender. Perhaps the easiest illustration centers on the word "intersex" which can apply to atypical organ development or to the presence of XX chromosomes in some cells and XY in others within the same individual. A brief internet search immediately shows that gender and sexual orientation involve complex physical, chemical, physiological, psychological, environmental, emotional, hormonal, and biological factors. The gender binary (either "male" OR "female") is thoroughly inadequate, being clearly inaccurate for a significant number of humans.

Why it matters

Sometimes sexual taboos have counterparts in racial taboos. Consider, for example, the high school teacher who believed interracial marriage was wrong and told biracial children in the school that they should not exist. A similar threat lies behind stigmatizing persons who fall outside the gender binary. Should these outside-of-traditional-categories individuals be made to internalize “I am offensive to God”? How can this concept, akin to the Calvinistic total depravity doctrine, exist in modern theology centered on God’s universal love?

A theology based on inaccurate observation and ignorance of science is simply wrong inasmuch as it does not account for (and apply to) all of God’s children.

What to do

Conversion therapy has been thoroughly debunked. Gender reassignment surgery, while providing an option to some people, is hardly to be applied as a legal requirement for all gender dysphoria. Sadly, those whose vision is limited to ancient understanding tend urgently to seek to simplify complex situations with corrective treatment—to cut the patient to fit the traditional bed. In contrast, those with the courage and foresight to endure some ambiguity and uncertainty will concentrate on new questions without imposing old answers.

In the past, ensconced organized religion imposed dogmas upon scientific research (for example, attempted to quash understanding of the heliocentric solar system as promoted by Galileo). We note particularly that the Bible has not helped as a primary textbook for celestial mechanics. As we expand from solar system to galaxy to universe to multiverse, progress depends on formulating new questions and recognizing when our answers are only partial explanations. Similarly, traditional theology

is not the primary tool for the study of biology (including evolution and sexuality), and the realism of our moral judgment is improved as we acknowledge the additional tools that become available over time, accepting that we do not know as much now as we will know in the future.

The search for better insight into, and classification of, gender and sexual orientation does not threaten the morality of devotion and fidelity. Rape and unwelcomed seduction are never justified by the pathological mental state of the perpetrator. Likewise sexual minority status cannot justify unbridled license. When the rules governing sexual behavior accommodate the inherent complexity of gender, they will continue to respect the rights of all individuals, including progeny, while rejecting coercion and domination by individuals or by the state. Social morality matures as it combines scientific fact with well-mannered self restraint and interpersonal decency.

According to many positive examples, it appears that the state interest in stable families is well served by committed same-sex marriages grounded in the fundamental human right of association, and state-enforced definitions of chastity are not in the public interest.

Now in deference to theology

Parenthood is not required for salvation. The above discussion does not in any way defend promiscuity. Copulation or shared sexual stimulation between people of spiritual commitment is a conditional privilege of mutuality and consent, not necessarily available to all persons. Religious marriage continues to be a vow of celibacy commencing at such time as either partner no longer enjoys intercourse.

Epilog

Please do not read the preceding paragraph as a dogmatic polemic. Knowing the gentleness of the author (me), I recognize it as a heartfelt poignant declaration of genuine love.

§2 Fear Is Not Godly

Many sermons attempt to teach that “fear of God” means “love of God.” I find this doublespeak unnecessary and unwanted because it is misleading to invoke and then whitewash a strongly negative word when the good news can be better expressed with strong positive words. Fearing venomous animals has a logical function; fearing a personal God does not.

I fault the Old Testament for its undercurrents of exceptionalism and fear. That god favors certain children over others (an adulterous king is not stoned to death; chosen people are commanded to commit genocide) and kills those who disagree with him. Indeed, the jealous god of wrath appears as a racist, sexist, homophobic, exceptionalist, isolationist, genocidal megalomaniac who brooks no opposition. This story of fear should be stored on the academic shelf next to Greek mythology—a study of human weakness, not explication of a deity to be emulated.

The mind control of pain avoidance contrasts with my appreciation of the Buddhist teaching that accurate understanding purifies motivation to constructive action, which is living the peace that liberates us from suffering. Enlightenment is presented in strong positive words.