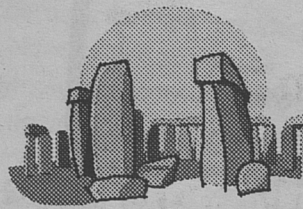


# STONEHENGE TO STONEWALL

by charlie emond



## Unnatural Law

This month, I had planned to write on a few gay heroes of the Renaissance, but after writing about sheep in my last column (and adding the teaser on Francis Bacon and a dead chicken), I started thinking about the connections between homosexuality and "nature." Then, when the Pope condemned the big gay pride 2000 festival in Rome and declared, "homosexual acts go against natural law," that did it! Let's just see what natural law he might have had in mind.

To begin with, the whole idea that something can be 'natural' or 'unnatural' is not even a Christian concept. It is a concept of Greek and Roman philosophers like Seneca. But perhaps the Pope was thinking about St. Peter Damien's words to his monks: "God established all earthly things for the use of humans . . . from animals, people may learn what behavior should be imitated and what avoided." (However, the fact that Peter identifies the weasel as a reptile should give us a hint of things to come!)

### Talk to the animals

Following Peter's suggestion, we should we look to animals for guidance and example in sexual matters. OK. Animals are by nature promiscuous. They do not care about marriage or fidelity. They do not care whether or not another male or female is perhaps a parent or mature offspring. Male animals are often uninterested in their young (except as dinner) and many will cheerfully hump even a rough approximation of a female. (Check out your dog as a convenient example of many of the above "natural" virtues.) But somehow I don't think this is

the "natural law" the Pope had in mind.

Perhaps he finds gay sexuality to be reprehensible because it is unknown among the animals. (However, a short stroll through the Vatican zoo will enlighten him on this one.) It is

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well known that there are few species of animals among which same-sex activity has NOT been observed. In fact, most animals in the mood will go after anything even close. (While we are on the subject of natural law, I would like to ask His Holiness, which "natural law" the church is following in demanding celibacy of its priests?)

### You are what you eat

Even more interesting than the idea of basing our sex lives on those of animals is the fact that there are entire species of animals that the church has declared sexually deviant! From ancient times through the Middle Ages, one of the most popular forms of entertainment was the bestiary - a book of anecdotes about animals which was considered both a manual of piety and a zoology textbook. One of them, the *Physiologus*, cautions, "You

shall not eat the weasel nor anything like it . . . it has this trait: the female receives from the male in her mouth, becomes pregnant, and gives birth through her ears." (I remind you here that I am NOT making this stuff up.) What

would happen if you did break down and have a weasel burger for lunch? ". . . this will make you commit illicit acts orally with the unclean."

In the first place, I can't imagine why anyone would consider eating a weasel. And you would think that *somebody* would take the time to actually watch a couple of these creatures in action before writing about them! (An interesting side note here; the testicles of the weasel were prescribed as a contraceptive. Presumably, the person who ate them would be otherwise occupied with either the oral "illicit acts" or perhaps vomiting into a nearby bush.)

### Roast hyena anyone?

To continue in the same vein, (from the *Physiologus*, again) "The law says, 'You

shall not eat the hyena or anything like it' ...it is male-female, that is, at one time male and at another female." This one goes back to Leviticus (11:5) and it is cheerfully repeated for centuries without anyone bothering to check out the facts. What will happen if you succumb to the temptation to cook up a hyena? You will "... become an adulterer or a seducer or like them." To cure homosexuality you should take the fur of a hyena and apply it around the anus of a sodomite. (Frankly, I don't know any sodomites who would hold still for this one!)

### Peter Rabbit with a twist

Another of the blacklisted animals is the hare. "Thou shall not eat the hare for the hare grows a new anal opening each year so that however many years he has lived he has that many anuses." In addition, the male hare bears the little hares in his womb where it also carries larger previously conceived hares. Alexander Neckam (d.1217) concludes, "Effeminate men who violate the law of nature are thus said to imitate hares, offending against the highest majesty of nature." ("Multiple Anuses" would, by the way, make a great name for a rock group.)

These cautionary tales

against homosexual behavior were wildly popular and accepted as gospel truth for centuries. Perhaps these were the "natural laws" the Pope was referring to? Curiously, nobody - not even the Pope - has figured out that the Creator made the hares, the weasels, and the hyenas whatever way they are. Blaming entire species for being deviant and sinful is absurd. It is just as absurd as blaming gay men and lesbians and lots of folks in between for following their "natural law."

**Next time: Bacon and the dead chicken!**

### For More Information:

This gay history column is the 20th in a series that began in prehistory. My research for this column comes mainly from John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

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