

Trial of Faith

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On a recent visit to Utah, I was excited to attend church with my parents at their LDS ward. Regular attendance at my own ward in Minneapolis has become an important part of my life. But perhaps because of the unique role of family-centered piety in Mormonism, I always find special comfort in attending church with my parents. Furthermore, because of my many years of alienation from the LDS Church, my parents find it deeply gratifying that for the first time in twenty years, I *want* to go with them. Attendance at church as a family is perhaps an affirmation of the bonds we hope will endure between us in the eternities.

On this particular visit, we were treated in Sunday School to an outpouring of homophobic commentary from members of the class unlike anything any of us had ever heard before. Homosexuals were evidence of the collapse of society in the end times. The gay rights movement was an example of evil displaying itself shamelessly before the world. Homosexuals were among those “that call evil good, and good evil.” We sat helplessly as, for several minutes, one stereotype after another was rehearsed. My mother held my hand, trying to reassure me. The teacher finally drew the discussion to a close by commenting that we ought to have compassion for sinners. After the class was dismissed, I could only whisper to my parents my great relief that my non-LDS partner had decided he would rather sleep late this particular morning than join us.

I can't say that this episode did not hurt me. Members of this ward know that my parents have a gay son. I was introduced to the class as their son, visiting from distant Minneapolis. Were these comments made deliberately for my benefit? Or is the Church's anti-gay-marriage campaign stirring ugly sentiments that until now remained latent? I wanted to leave. If I could have left without drawing attention to myself I would have. But at

that moment, the Spirit was there quietly saying, “Don’t listen to that. You are in the right place. You are doing what you need to do. Your Heavenly Father is very pleased with you.” The Spirit reassured me that the Lord would take care of me and that I simply needed to be patient. So I did not regret the experience. I learned that my dignity does not depend on what others say and that the Holy Spirit will sustain me even through situations I would have imagined unbearable.

Over the past year or so, in response to a dramatic spiritual experience I had at the Sunstone Symposium of August 2005, I have been trying to define for myself a middle path between the polar extremes of, on the one hand, embracing the Church and rejecting the love I share with my partner and, on the other, rejecting the Church and embracing my sexuality.¹ If the Church is becoming increasingly polarized over this issue by the current political debate, perhaps it is absurd to hope for such a middle road. Still, I believe that rejecting judgmental postures while enhancing openness, love, compassion, hope, and humility on all sides of this debate is more crucial now than it ever was before.

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In recent decades, gay² Latter-day Saints have elaborated in print varying responses to “same-gender attraction.” The earliest published response might be characterized as the Mormon “liberalization” position. In 1978, one year after the founding of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, Cloy Jenkins and others produced a pamphlet entitled *Prologue: An Examination of the Mormon Attitude toward Homosexuality*, making a case for the Church to liberalize its views of homosexuality and to end its policy of excommunicating sexually active gay or lesbian members.³ This position, though it has resonated well with large numbers of gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints, has been rejected by Church leaders and by the majority of the orthodox LDS rank and file.

I am aware of only one statistical study, based on published memoirs and a survey of Mormon gay men and lesbians. The data from this study corroborate my own impression, drawn from extensive reading of personal accounts and personal knowledge through friends and acquaintances, that the vast majority of gay men and lesbians who hope for a liberalization of the Church’s position tend to be alienated from the Church right now. Gary T. Horlacher in October 2006 presented a paper at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) conference, reporting

the results of his review of fifty personal accounts published by LDS gay men and lesbians and his in-depth qualitative and quantitative survey of 165 individuals. Almost all of his survey respondents were once highly active as measured by Church attendance, tithing payment, and missionary service. About one-third of his respondents were celibate, heterosexually monogamous, and/or actively participating in reparative therapy. Among the two-thirds of survey respondents who were no longer active in the Church, 52 percent classified themselves as “inactive,” 16 percent as “excommunicated,” 8 percent as having joined “other religions,” while 24 percent considered themselves “non-religious.”⁴

Other responses to same-gender attraction have accepted the premise that same-sex sexual expression is a sin but have varied in their view of the best way to deal with same-sex orientation. In 1989, Evergreen International was founded, promoting what might be called the “reparative therapy” position, that homosexuality can be diminished or completely healed. Five years later, Deseret Book published *Born That Way?*, one Mormon woman’s account of how she completely overcame homosexual attraction and is now successfully married.⁵ This second point of view has at times received encouragement and support from the Church hierarchy. Until the late 1990s, Church leaders encouraged many gay men to get married as a means of “overcoming” their homosexuality. Though many who have self-identified as gay have tried this approach, it does not seem to have been successful for more than a handful. Based on a preponderance of evidence, this position is probably unrealistic for those who do not experience at least some opposite-gender attraction to begin with—in other words, those who are not at least somewhat bisexual.

In the face of mounting evidence that “reparative therapy” is not feasible for the majority of same-gender-oriented individuals, an alternative position increasingly endorsed by Church leaders has been, in President Hinckley’s words, that gay Mormons should be allowed to “go forward” in the Church so long as they remain celibate.⁶ The case for this third or “celibacy” position was made eloquently by Ty Mansfield in 2004, in *In Quiet Desperation*, which he co-authored with Fred and Marilyn Matis and which Deseret Book published.⁷ In it, Mansfield discusses what it has meant to him to contemplate lifelong celibacy as a faithful response to living with same-gender attraction: “Even though family is a critical part of the gospel and an important part of the mortal Church, our faith and conviction should not be built entirely upon having our own family here in this life.

. . . Although it may be difficult for someone with same-gender attraction to stay in the Church and remain faithful to its standards, if we have true faith that there is something more after this life, we are assured that the faith and sacrifice will be worth it.”⁸ This position has the advantage of acknowledging the real-life experience of the vast majority of gay and lesbian Mormons who have made good-faith efforts to change their sexual orientation but have failed. It offers a path to acceptance in the Church that is within the realm of possibility for all, without requiring an ability to “change.” This position was strongly endorsed in a recent interview that LDS Public Relations conducted with Apostle Dallin H. Oaks and Seventy Lance B. Wickman, an interview to which I will return in some depth.⁹

A fourth position might be characterized as the “mixed orientation marriage.” The case for this position was made by Ben Christensen in a provocative essay describing his decision as a gay man to marry a straight woman, with full disclosure before marriage and with a mutual commitment between him and his wife to work around the emotional and sexual limitations inherent in such a relationship.¹⁰ As a model for negotiating one’s same-sex orientation and Church practice, this position is similar to reparative therapy in its hope that heterosexual marriage can be a way forward. But it is also similar to the celibacy position (and different from reparative therapy) in its acknowledgment that a change in sexual orientation is unlikely.

Lester J. Leavitt, in a self-published memoir,¹¹ discussed his mixed-orientation marriage from the point of view of a man who initially married in hopes of changing his sexual orientation, but who did everything possible to make his marriage succeed once he realized that a change in sexual orientation was not forthcoming. During my conversations with him and his wife, Barbara, at the Affirmation Conference in Portland in October 2006, they spoke about honesty and fidelity as the bedrock of their marriage. Lester’s stake president excommunicated him in June 2006 as a consequence of publishing his memoir. Ironically, he feels certain that, had he not been able openly to express his feelings about men in his memoir, it would have been impossible for him to remain faithful to his wife. Thus, the vehicle that enabled him to honor his marriage became the cause of his excommunication.

After his excommunication, Lester made it clear to me that his commitment to his marriage was no longer based on any personal belief that

temple marriage is necessary for exaltation, nor, obviously, was it any more a strategy for maintaining good standing in the Church. It was based solely on his genuine feelings of affection for his wife. Barbara confirmed to me that she chose to work at preserving their marriage for the same reasons.

In a recent email correspondence, Lester announced to me that, after more than twenty-five years of marriage, he and his wife have finally decided to separate. In his words, they decided that continuing as a married couple was a “compromise” that was unfair to both of them. He poignantly wrote: “[Had I] been repeatedly unfaithful to Barbara, or hidden my behavior, or been dishonest, then we could not have achieved what we did. We reached the point that she wanted what was best for me, our love had become that strong.”¹² Clearly there are enormous challenges involved in making such a relationship work, even when there is a high level of communication, trust, and affection between two partners of differing sexual orientations.

I have observed a bifurcation in the LDS gay and lesbian community between, on the one hand, those who have reconciled themselves with their gayness and who are alienated from the LDS Church (i.e., those who typically embrace the “liberalization” position) and, on the other hand, those who seek good standing in the LDS Church and who see their same-sex orientation as problematic and define same-sex sexual behavior and relationships as sinful (i.e., those who typically embrace one of the latter three positions).

In a personal essay published in the April 2006 issue of *Sunstone*, I described my own recent conversion experience and my efforts to reconcile being gay and living in a committed same-sex relationship with my testimony of the Church.¹³ At the August 2006 *Sunstone* Symposium, I presented a paper in which I discussed two scriptural models of faithfulness for those who are gay and Mormon and living in same-gender relationships, in which I affirmed the importance of acknowledging the teaching and doctrinal authority of current LDS leaders.¹⁴ I would describe my own position as I am developing it in writing and public speaking as a “waiting” or a “growth” position. In this paper I would like to explore more fully what it means to affirm my relationship with my partner as good and also to embrace the LDS Church and the LDS gospel.

Oddly, the belief that there can be no such “middle ground” seems to be held alike by conservative Mormons *and* alienated ex-Mormons. The

attitude on the conservative side seems to be fueled by the belief that, as long as I am in an intimate relationship with a person of the same sex, punishment and exclusion are the only interactions that can possibly motivate me to reform myself. The attitude on the anti-Mormon side seems to be that gay people are better off just weaning themselves permanently away from the Church, because the Church today is corrupt and blinded by prejudice. I reject both premises. In my experience, polarization and extremes like those we see over this issue seldom allow for growth or change.

While I find great hope and comfort in LDS doctrine about the eternal family, I hope to avoid interpretations of that doctrine that needlessly cause despair among those who don't fit the norm. While I believe that commitment to a life of celibacy can have value among both straight and gay Latter-day Saints, if embraced in the right way, I believe we undermine its value when we make it a requirement. While I don't appreciate the use of scripture to humiliate and "bash" gay folks, I believe that scriptural teaching about sin is central to faith and that scriptural teaching about sexual morality has direct relevance to our search for meaning and happiness. In my understanding of Church history and human destiny, I believe that we gay Saints need the Church and the Church needs us. Great joy and opportunity await us if we find it in our hearts to reconcile ourselves, despite the unique challenges we face in becoming reconciled.

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When I first began work on this essay, I intended the primary focus to be the doctrinal or theological questions related to homosexuality. Many who have written on this subject have asked: Why would God allow so many to come into mortality with this condition if it was his will that we marry and have families? This question has sometimes led to speculation about the possible role—positive or negative—that homosexuality may play in the plan of salvation. As I have continued in my present path, however, I have gradually found that the ability to move forward is less a question of doctrine and more a question of faith and practice. The very nature of mortal probation requires us to walk without ultimate knowledge. I believe that the ability to cultivate the virtues of charity, faith, and hope without always knowing *why* we are called upon to exhibit certain kinds of faith is exactly what we are supposed to do. The time may come when we will know why some of us are gay and others are straight, but that time is not now.

It is possible that our spirits were created both gendered and heterosexual and that homosexuality in this life is produced by a kind of earthly, mortal flaw that thwarts our fundamentally heterosexual spiritual natures. It does not *feel* this way to me. The basic sense of completion I find in my relationship with my same-sex partner suggests that my connection to him flows from a deeper spiritual reality. It is not as if my attraction to him is merely a physical attraction, a “temptation,” while some deeper, more spiritual part of me longs for union with a woman. I find so many longings—physical, emotional, and spiritual—met in my relationship with him. However, for the sake of intellectual honesty, I must confess that I do not know how much these kinds of feelings are determined by our spirits and how much are determined by the mortal temples in which our spirits currently dwell. If the temple is flawed in some way, then perhaps how this *feels* to me while I dwell in mortal flesh is misleading.

However, as I have sought guidance from the Holy Spirit about how to proceed in relation to my partner of fifteen years, it has been made clear to me that it would be not just a terrible mistake but a sin for me to abandon him. I don’t profess to know more from these spiritual affirmations than that my course of action is right for me. The reasons may be very specific, very mortally contingent. We know of cases in the scriptural record—God’s commandment to Abraham to sacrifice Isaac or Nephi’s slaying of Laban—where the demands of a particular situation overrode general moral principles.

But I believe it is also entirely possible that, if our spirits are in fact created gendered, the range and expression of eternal gender is much broader and more diverse than we, in our limited mortal fashion are capable of comprehending. It could be that the Spirit is affirming that my partner and I must stay together because our relationship holds eternal promise and potential. If intellectual honesty on my part demands that I acknowledge the first possibility—that homosexuality is nothing but a mortal flaw—then based on my experience of my relationship with my partner and my growing self-understanding, it also demands that I not rule out this second possibility.

In a brief autobiography I published in the *Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance* in 1997, I have described how, as I obeyed the teachings of the Church, I found that instead of being healed of my feelings of attraction to men, these feelings seemed only to grow stronger. I decided to openly acknowledge my homosexuality both to myself and others after a

period of fasting and prayer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As I “came out,” I had a powerful sense of the presence of the Spirit in my life, affirming that my move toward greater openness and self-acceptance was the direction God wanted me to go.¹⁵

Now more recently, as the result of my decision to renew my faith as a Latter-day Saint and reconnect with the LDS Church, I have experienced a deepened connection with my life partner. It seems that, at key junctures in my life, greater acceptance of my sexuality has enabled me to experience a greater connection to God and that deepening my relationship with God has similarly led to intensified appreciation of my sexuality. This dynamic once seemed contradictory to me. But this is how Ty Mansfield described a similar experience in his own memoir: “No matter what level of personal righteousness I attained or how close I felt to God, the feelings weren’t going away. To the contrary, they were increasing. It was a paradox!”¹⁶ Over the years, I have received similar reports from other gay friends, who described how times of spiritual awakening or focus in their lives also seemed to correlate with a heightened awareness of their same-gender-oriented sexuality. If our Heavenly Father created some of us both gendered and homosexual, it would explain why, no matter how much we plead and pray and try, our sexual orientation *simply does not change*. I present these observations because I think it is important information to consider in pondering this problem.

There was a time when I would have insisted on affirming the latter scenario—that God “made me this way”—rather than the former—that being gay means my mortal temple is flawed. The prophet and a number of apostles have acknowledged that they simply do not know what causes homosexuality, nor do they know why so many members of the Church must struggle to come to terms with this condition in their lives.¹⁷ I have come to the point that I am willing to acknowledge that I do not know the answer to these questions either. Given the intense nature of the struggle for most of us—many have succumbed to despair and suicide—I have found that the safest course for me is to listen carefully to the Spirit. Honestly acknowledging that I simply do not know and that I must simply trust God has brought healing and has enabled me to experience a deeper, more meaningful relationship with God. It is God alone who understands the unique path I must follow, and it is through the Spirit alone that I receive the guidance I need to continue safely. I believe that we, as a Church, will receive answers to these questions when we have demonstrated that we

have the wisdom to use this greater understanding. But I also believe that, on occasion, divine knowledge is deliberately withheld from us that God may test us.

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In recent years, the leadership of the Church has distanced itself from approaches to homosexuality that encourage marriage as a cure and has instead moved toward the official position of the Catholic Church and some conservative Protestant denominations that emphasize celibacy as the appropriate response to same-sex orientation. The August 2006 interview that LDS Public Affairs conducted with Elders Oaks and Wickman answered in greater depth than ever before a series of questions about same-gender attraction.¹⁸ They stressed that the Church neither endorses nor encourages reparative therapy as a response to “same-gender attraction.” They also emphasized that men who have struggled with same-gender attraction should marry only if they “feel a great attraction for a daughter of God.”¹⁹ On the other hand, they encouraged Church members and leaders to fully embrace and support in every way those who have chosen to live celibately. They reaffirmed a recent statement of the First Presidency that “we of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reach out with understanding and respect for individuals who are attracted to those of the same gender.” Quoting President Gordon B. Hinckley, they reiterated, “We love them . . . as sons and daughters of God. . . . If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church.” Regarding the kinds of Church service gay or lesbian members could be involved in, they acknowledged that callings having marriage as a prerequisite could not be extended to celibate individuals, but Elder Oaks stressed, “Every teaching position, every missionary position can be held by single people. We welcome [them] to that kind of service.” A substantial portion of the interview was also devoted to justifying the Church’s political opposition to same-sex marriage.

The interview acknowledged the criticism that the Church’s current policy is unfair because it holds gay men and lesbians to a much more difficult standard of conduct—lifelong celibacy—than that to which it holds its heterosexual members—sexual abstinence until marriage and fidelity afterward. The interviewer asked: “If somebody has a very powerful heterosexual drive, there is the opportunity for marriage. If a young man

thinks he's gay, what we're really saying to him is that there is simply no other way to go but to be celibate for the rest of his life if he doesn't feel any attraction to women?" Elder Oaks acknowledged that there are "differences" between the situation faced by gay and lesbian members and that faced by heterosexual members and even acknowledged that the situation was "tragic." Elder Wickman conceded, "There's really no question that there is an anguish associated with the inability to marry in this life. We feel for someone that has that anguish. I feel for somebody that has that anguish." Nevertheless, both defended the Church's policy by comparing the situation faced by gay folks to the situation faced by people living with severe mental or physical disabilities (such as "total paralysis") that do not permit them to marry.²⁰

There is, of course, a significant difference between a person living with a mental or physical disability so severe as to preclude an adult relationship and the situation of a gay or lesbian person who has the capacity to enter into a loving, committed, intimate adult relationship but who is being told that he or she must not. The dilemma posed by this difference could not have been more eloquently stated than by Ben Christensen in defending his choice as a gay man to marry a woman:

The problem is, no one offers any better solutions within the bounds of LDS doctrine. Apparently, the current alternative offered by the First Presidency is "great loneliness." What kind of alternative is that? Am I to accept that a Church which proclaims "that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children" would say that marriage and family simply aren't options for me? Yes, many people don't have the opportunity to marry in this life. That, in my opinion, is a tragedy. Why then should I *choose* loneliness? But if heterosexual marriage is "doomed to fail" and homosexual marriage is a sin, that's exactly what I'm expected to do.²¹

Very few indeed would *choose* to live a life of celibacy, especially in a Church community and culture that values family and relationships as highly as the LDS community.

Shortly after leaving the LDS Church, I explored the possibility of lifelong celibacy by seeking out a community that not only values celibacy but sees it as an exalted state. During my mission in southern France, I taught a young man who never joined the LDS Church but who always impressed me as a deeply spiritual, Christ-centered individual. We continued to correspond after I returned from my mission, and he ultimately joined a Roman Catholic monastic order, the Order of St. John. As I was

coming to terms with being gay, through this friend I sought and received permission to spend a summer at the monastery, praying, studying, and working with the monks, generally living under the same rules they lived under.

Though we usually observed silence as part of the discipline of the order, there were many opportunities over the course of the summer when it was appropriate to speak with the monks. Whenever I had a chance, I asked members of the order one-on-one to tell me more about what had moved them to make such an unconventional decision. I specifically asked them to tell me about what celibacy meant to them. Every single person responded that it would be very unwise to commit oneself to a life of celibacy because one was running away from one's sexuality. This motivation would not be sufficient to sustain an individual over the long haul and could, in fact, become destructive. One had, in effect, to feel *called* to celibacy. Furthermore, every monk I spoke with expressed the strong sense that it was a calling for a relatively small number of people.

The time that I spent with the brothers of the Order of St. John was one of the most spiritual experiences of my life, comparable in many ways to the spiritual high I had experienced as an LDS missionary. Taking the monks' advice to heart, I used this time for soul-searching, fasting, and prayer—asking God to help me discern whether I had a calling to celibacy—be it within a cloister or out in the wide world. Gradually it became clear to me that celibacy was not my calling. This realization came with a growing sense—congruous with my LDS upbringing—of the role an intimate relationship can play in our eternal, spiritual development.

Much of the language used to discuss homosexuality in the Church describes it as an urge to commit a sinful act. One can and must resist sinful urges. But I believe that it is more accurate to describe homosexuality as the way in which certain individuals are able to experience intimacy. No gay men or lesbians that I know view their same-gender orientation as being just about sex. I believe a more accurate description is that our sexual orientation determines what kinds of people we are most comfortable experiencing a broad range of intimacies with—emotional, spiritual, and social as well as sexual. While some remarkable individuals—both heterosexual and homosexual—do not experience such an intense need for intimacy, the majority—both gay and straight—long for it and feel incomplete without it. Confronted with the denial of any prospect of ever having an intimate relationship, many experience deep despair. Those who do not

achieve such intimacy experience this inability, in the words of Elder Oaks and Ben Christensen, as “tragic.”

While Roman Catholics, who have a long and rich history with celibacy, stress that it can never be externally imposed and that it should be viewed as a unique calling, the current policy of the LDS Church is to make it a requirement for an entire class of people, to which our failure to conform is considered sinful enough that it must result in excommunication. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, the LDS Church does not hold a very exalted concept of celibacy. Traditionally those who are single have generally been viewed as less fortunate—or even more sinful—than those who are married.²² Those who choose to remain single have traditionally been viewed as fated “to remain separately and singly, without exaltation . . . ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory” (D&C 132:17, 16). While in the Roman Catholic Church, all positions of ordained leadership are explicitly reserved for those who have committed themselves to lives of celibacy, Elders Oaks and Wickman acknowledged that the LDS Church reserves its positions of high leadership, even on the ward and stake level, for those who are married. It is hard to imagine many Latter-day Saints embracing celibacy purely out of a negative motivation to avoid sin. Indeed, if the witness of the brothers of St. John has any value, it would be counterproductive to do so.

Celibacy is one of the greatest sacrifices that could possibly be asked of us. If I were to commit myself to it, I need to know that some higher purpose is served by it—and not just the purpose of my own personal salvation but the kind of larger purpose we find in the LDS belief that God’s purpose unfolds through families. As Ty Mansfield has written:

My whole life and perceived place in the Church had been built partly on my aspirations for a future family. When I finally confronted the hard reality that my lifelong desire might not be realized in this life, I became completely despondent. . . . But the Spirit of the living God has helped me to know that I do have a place in His kingdom—that I and every child of God who is willing to make and keep covenants, despite our differences, are desperately needed as part of His “body” if it is truly to be whole.²³

Mansfield would hesitate to describe celibacy as a calling, *per se*. He sees his commitment to celibacy simply as preparation to receive celestial marriage. Still he discusses living with same-gender attraction as an opportunity to serve others and to be a witness of Christ to the world. In this, I ap-

prehend a growing sense of how the sacrifice of celibacy can embody the love of God.

It is hard for me to know what life choices I might have made differently twenty years ago if the greater openness in relation to same-gender attraction that seems to be emerging in the Church today had prevailed when I was coming of age. What if I had grown up in a church where singleness had not been viewed as a sin and a curse, but instead as a possible means of blessing the Church and blessing others? When I was coming to terms with being gay in the mid-1980s, there was never any hint that I might be supported by the Church or its leaders in a path of celibacy. Homosexuality was still largely regarded in the Church as a “choice,” a “disease” that could be “cured,” or a “sin” that could be repented of. The language used to discuss homosexuality included words like “perversion” and “abomination,” which were factors in the plummeting self-esteem and rising depression that almost led me to attempt to take my own life. I can only imagine how things might have been different for me if someone, a bishop or a priesthood leader, had lovingly put his arms around me and told me: “I understand you did not choose this. God loves you and this will not interfere with your chances of returning to your Heavenly Father’s presence. I love you, so let’s work together on finding a way to help you be faithful and to help you be of service, even within the constraints you are living under.” This never happened, and I was forced to find my own way as best I could—outside of the Church. I am still convinced that leaving the Church for a very long time was the only way I could rebuild my self-esteem and begin to experience divine love again in the wake of the spiritual damage I suffered in the Church.

It is possible that even if someone had reached out to me in a compassionate way, I could not have stayed attached to the Church at that time. After reading Marilyn Matis’s account of her son’s life and suicide, I was struck by how loved and supported Stuart was by everyone significant in his life—his parents, his Church leaders, his friends. This impression was underscored by Robert Rees’s review of *In Quiet Desperation*, as he described his own interactions with Stuart.²⁴ Stuart had many fine Latter-day Saints who loved him and supported his commitment to celibacy. Yet he still succumbed to suicide, “choking,” as his suicide note put it, “on my own inferiority.”²⁵ To assume that my situation would have been just fine if only I had had then the kinds of support the Church is today willing to offer people is just too simplistic.

In their interview on same-gender attraction, Elders Oaks and Wickman implied that same-gender-oriented individuals enter into intimate relationships with each other because they cannot resist the pressures of living “in a society which is so saturated with sexuality.” As a result, Elder Wickman continued, “it perhaps is more troublesome now . . . for a person to look beyond their [sic] gender orientation to other aspects of who they are.” While I agree that TV advertising and programming, movies, pop music, magazines, and other aspects of mass culture are sex-saturated, even pornographic, and that this factor can make it more challenging to live chastely, I feel that the subsequent generalization about same-sex relationships misses an important point. We don’t enter into relations and forge long-term commitments (such as my fifteen-year commitment with my partner) because we are succumbing to a sex-saturated culture. Ultimately, we enter into and maintain such commitments because we need and are nurtured by intimate love. We seek and enter into intimate relationships, not because we are gay but because we are human.

Just like straight Latter-day Saints, gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints find meaning in intimate relationships. Regardless of the gender of one’s partner, fostering a successful lifelong commitment requires us to resist pressures and temptations that threaten to fray and undermine that relationship, including sexual temptations. Many of these relationships include children from previous marriages or by adoption. It requires us to develop all of the qualities that we as Latter-day Saints believe we came into this life to learn: selflessness, honesty, fidelity, and compassion. My committed relationship with my partner has been the context for the most significant spiritual and moral growth I have experienced in my life. It feels more akin to what I learned growing up and attending church than what I see reflected in our sex-obsessed popular culture. I thank my Heavenly Father daily for it, and I have never received any spiritual indication that my perception of this relationship as a gift of God was inaccurate.

Nevertheless, our relationships with significant others, no matter how significant, do not meet *all* our needs. I have, after twenty years away from the LDS Church, found myself turning back because of the realization that I am more whole, joyful, and centered with the Church’s teachings, guidance, community, and communion in my life. But increasingly I find my love for the Church and my love for my partner intertwined. I could not reject either and remain a person of integrity. I could not be dis-

loyal to either and not feel that at some level I was betraying both myself and God.

I believe that celibacy can be a positive path for gay and lesbian people. I know from my experience with Catholic monks in France, and now from my more recent experience with celibate gay Latter-day Saints like Ty Mansfield, that the practice of celibacy can bring a powerful and positive spiritual focus. It can permit those who commit to it in the proper spirit to grow in ways not otherwise possible. It enables forms of service not possible to those who enter into relationships or nurture families. If, furthermore, as some Church leaders are currently suggesting, chastity in this life is the only thing that can qualify gay and lesbian people for eternal marriage in the next life, it might be argued that, whatever the spiritual, emotional, or psychological costs of celibacy, it is worth the sacrifice. I have no basis for denying this as a general principle, though I trust Heavenly Father and I trust the guidance I have received through the Spirit that if I am faithful to my partner everything will eventually work out for the best.

As a practical matter, the cost of imposing celibacy on someone against his or her will is extremely high. Living up to such a standard is difficult and can be terribly isolating. I am concerned that imposing celibacy on an entire class of people based on a personal attribute which they did not choose and cannot change will inevitably foster a sense of inferiority and shame, especially in a Church that values family as highly as ours. At the very least, a growth-oriented approach should encourage us to seek ways to welcome gay and lesbian people into Church fellowship, even if they are not willing or able immediately to commit to celibacy. We would learn to trust that positive change occurs in people's lives as a result of inviting them into fellowship, not excluding them.

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The debate about homosexuality in American churches has focused on whether it is a sin.²⁶ In LDS circles, an additional focus has, not surprisingly, been on the role of marriage in the LDS community and in the LDS concept of salvation.²⁷ In both LDS and non-LDS contexts, the argument has been advanced that sin implies the capability of choosing; and if a same-gender sexual orientation—which most concede is not chosen—inhibits an individual from finding intimacy within the bonds of heterosexual marriage, then the failure to marry cannot be a sin. Neither, argue the liberalizers, can seeking intimacy in a same-gender relationship.²⁸ In re-

cent years, while softening some of the harsh rhetoric describing homosexuality as an “abomination,” Church leaders have maintained that LDS scripture is unequivocal that exaltation can only be achieved through heterosexual temple marriage and that, if such marriage is not possible, then chastity is the only acceptable path. Therefore homosexual behavior must be sinful even if homosexual orientation is not.²⁹

Early in my spiritual journey, I felt I had a huge stake in this debate. The debate was clouded, I think, by fear and misunderstanding or hate on the part of many who insisted that homosexuality was a sin. I was naturally drawn to the genuine love, openness, and tolerance among the courageous few who embraced the liberalizing arguments. But I have gradually come to believe that my need to feel justified, and engaging in debates about the sinfulness of homosexuality to defend myself, was spiritually harmful.

A moment of truth came for me when I first began to read the Book of Mormon again after almost twenty years away from the Church. It was an emotional moment for me. I had felt the Spirit for some time prompting me to read it. As I sat on the edge of the bed holding in front of me an old, battered copy of the Book of Mormon that a friend had found at a garage sale and given me, partly as a joke, I realized that, in order to pray, I needed to acknowledge my many years of stubbornness, pride, and anger—at God, at the Church, at members of my family. I needed to acknowledge that I needed forgiveness and that I needed God’s guidance. That meant acknowledging my sinfulness.

As I made these verbal acknowledgments in my prayer, I was overcome by the purest sense of God’s love, by a completely transforming experience of God’s grace and forgiveness. If I wanted forgiveness, all I had to do was ask. All I had to do was turn to God. This overwhelming moment of grace prompted me to lay everything before God, to promise him that I would do “whatever you ask of me.” This was the most frightening, vulnerable prayer I have ever prayed. I had to acknowledge almost any possibility. Might the Spirit prompt me to leave my partner? But I received through the Spirit an assurance that whatever God asked of me, it would be based on love, he would prepare me to give it, and he would never ask of me anything that I could not give. I simply had to let go of my expectations and learn to trust. This has been the foundation of my relationship with God and has been my main source of strength ever since.

I understand now that I could never enter into this kind of a rela-

tionship—this kind of covenant—with God in a spirit of self-justification. Arguing about what constitutes a sin is precisely the kind of spirit that drives a wedge between us and God, that makes it impossible to do the one thing that makes any relationship with God meaningful: to listen. To listen without rationalizing, without justifications, without arguments. To listen to our fellow human beings, to the wisdom embodied in scripture, and, most of all, to the Spirit. Ultimately, if we listen to the Spirit and follow what we hear, we have no need of self-justification, not before God and certainly not before others. We may trust that what we cannot control or fix is forgiven through the Atonement, and we can focus on growing into the full stature of our creations.

I now have a new appreciation of why the fourth Article of Faith states that faith and repentance are the *first* principles of the gospel. I have come to understand repentance not merely as seeking forgiveness for and turning away from discrete wrongs that we commit—though a repentant person will do plenty of that—but as an approach to life that involves the recognition that, no matter how sanctified we become in this life, we will still not have reached the state of perfection to which God ultimately calls us. Repentance must not be something we do only when we commit some egregious error; rather it must be our fundamental orientation in this life and the eternities. The moment we think we are not in need of repentance, we have strayed.

I believe that this is why, when the wealthy young man came to Christ proclaiming that he had obeyed all of the commandments from his youth, Christ’s immediate response was, “Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me” (Luke 18:22). If we think that the point of discipleship to Christ is to bring us into conformity with some set of rules rather than to become what God would have us become, which is always more than what we are at any given moment, it is inevitable that we will reach a point where Christ asks more of us than the rules, and we will, like the young man in the story, go away sorrowful. This discipline of living a repentant life requires a type of humility that is absolutely inconsonant with self-justification or setting rules or bounds on what is expected of us. “That which breaketh a law, and abideth not by law, *but seeketh to become a law unto itself*, and willeth to abide in sin, and altogether abideth in sin, cannot be sanctified by law, neither by mercy, justice, nor judgment. Therefore, they must remain filthy still” (D&C 88:35; emphasis mine).

If self-justification drives a wedge between us and the Spirit, so does condemnation of others. In the parable of the debtors, after being forgiven a debt of 10,000 talents, a former debtor leaves his lord's presence only to go to a "fello-servant" who owed him one hundred pence, take him by the throat and demand, "Pay me that thou owest," and then have him cast into prison for his inability to pay. When news of this behavior reaches the lord, he revokes forgiveness of the 10,000 talent debt, and the ungrateful servant is "delivered . . . to the tormenters" (Matt. 8:23-35). When we undertake to judge others, we in essence establish the parameters for our own eventual treatment before the judgment seat of God. "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:1-2; see also 3 Ne. 14:1-2). When we arrogate to ourselves the judgment which is reserved to God alone, we undermine the very mercy on which our own salvation depends. I believe this is why a repeated theme in scripture is the admonition to the believer to leave the lofty prerogative of judgment to God alone. "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" (D&C 64:10). In the words of Alma, if we "are merciful unto [our] brethren," we "shall have mercy restored unto [us] again"; if we judge "righteously" we "shall have a righteous judgment" (Alma 41:14).

Apart from the spiritual peril involved in condemning others, from a practical standpoint we convince no one to repent by preaching at them or judging them. When married individuals tell us that we must be celibate for life, it feels as if "ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers" (Luke 11:46). Heterosexual Latter-day Saints may court, fall in love, make and enter into lifelong commitments, and then sexually consummate a relationship with the person of their choice, and feel that they do so with the approval of God and the blessing of the Church, even when to do so is simply to act on urges and impulses that come naturally to them.

The rhetorical device of emphasizing that "we all have struggles" usually comes across as self-serving. We *do* all have struggles. We *all*, gay and straight, have to struggle with selfishness, pride, addictions, anger, envy, or lust. Some of us face special challenges, such as a severe disability or the debilitating illness of a spouse. But citing one's own—or worse, another person's—struggles as a justification for condemning someone else does not demonstrate empathy. In my experience, those who have suf-

ferred the most in life are those who are least likely to assume that they know exactly what someone else is going through or how someone else should conduct his or her life. Empathy is about learning and understanding, not about presuming. Gay folks are frequently condemned for making choices under circumstances that those condemning have never bothered to learn about.

The Church's mission has always been to encourage souls to come unto Christ. We do not do this by adding to people's burdens with misunderstanding and judgment when they are already weary and discouraged. We invite all to come to Christ by reminding *all* that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). We invite all by exhibiting unfeigned empathy, patience, compassion, and humility. We invite by putting our arms around those who are weary, by reminding them that we love them and will be there for them no matter what. If homosexuality is a sin, then we should be able to trust that the Spirit will lead those who struggle with same-sex attraction to deal with that attraction positively. To assume that we must alienate, exclude, and ostracize gay folks or they will not repent shows a lack of faith. "Put your trust in that Spirit which leadeth to do good—yea, to do justly, to walk humbly, to judge righteously; and this is my Spirit" (D&C 11:12). But we cannot follow the Spirit if we have not entered into a relationship with the Spirit. And how will we enter into a relationship with the Spirit when we are driven from the heart of the Church, where we have the greatest opportunity of recognizing and receiving the Spirit?

On the other hand, if our negative views of homosexuality are simply culturally conditioned prejudice, if homosexuality is not a sin, then needlessly driving gay folks away from the Church through judgmentalism and arrogance will only be judged all the more grievous at the last day. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). Surely there is no point in entering into debates about this. Surely, regardless of what the "true" understanding of scripture is, there is only one imperative in scripture for believers and that is, first of all, to repent daily of one's own sins and then to invite and encourage others to enter into the same path. I believe that the ultimate right and wrong in any "issue" hinges on how we deal with and treat one another. Neither self-justification nor self-righteousness makes sense within a gospel context.

I am not suggesting that we abandon the rules. The order of the Church requires rules and also requires that disciplinary decisions be made by Church leaders. I count myself lucky—and most members should also—not to have to make those decisions which are necessary for the administration of God’s kingdom here on earth. In a broader sense, I truly believe that if we are obeying the Spirit, we will subject ourselves to a rule far more exacting than the Ten Commandments. Scripture and our temple covenants enjoin us to give up everything that we own and everything that we are. The question for gay and straight Latter-day Saint alike becomes, “How can I, given the unique constraints of my mortal existence, live in such a way as to maximize love, compassion, and mercy?” If we are truly following the Spirit and exercising free agency as Heavenly Father intended us to, it is possible that every one of us may answer this question differently, and yet we will find ourselves growing in a truer and more complete unity than we might ever have imagined possible.

* * *

I believe that a growth-oriented approach to the conflict over homosexuality will call us to focus more on loyalty—to each other and to the cause of the Church—than on perfect conformity. I look at the question of commitment to the Church from the wide-angle viewpoint of millennia of history and from the viewpoint of prophetic destiny. I consider our history as a Latter-day Saint people particularly instructive. In the early years of the Church, the first converts—our spiritual forebears—faced tremendous, seemingly overwhelming adversity. At times, that adversity literally threatened to annihilate them as a people. They survived by pulling together.

In the early Church, Joseph had tolerance for shockingly divergent points of view but little tolerance for disloyalty.³⁰ Doctrinal latitude combined with loyalty was functional in the early Church. That early community was too small and vulnerable to risk fragmentation over doctrinal differences. On the other hand, intense external pressures made it extremely advantageous to promote an ethic of supporting one another and bearing one another’s burdens. This ethic, developed by the very concept of gathering with the Saints in a center place, sacrificing to build the Kirtland Temple, and suffering together through the Missouri trials, stood the Saints in good stead in the months and years following Joseph’s assassination, as persecution drove them out of Nauvoo and sent them to the Great

Basin. The internal cohesion developed in these years made it possible for the Saints to withstand incredible external pressure during the decades of the federal government's antipolygamy campaign. I find it significant that, in these years, a much more tolerant attitude in relation to homosexuality also happened to prevail among Latter-day Saints than that which prevails today. Michael Quinn has documented that statutes against sodomy were enacted in nineteenth-century Utah only by federal imposition and that nineteenth-century Mormons did not really show much interest in enforcing them. Nineteenth-century Church leaders virtually never spoke about homosexuality, nor did they tend to excommunicate for homosexual offenses.³¹

In the years since the Manifesto, as the Saints have experienced ever-growing prosperity and inclusion in the American mainstream, we have seen a growing emphasis on conformity and a greater willingness to single out, isolate, and expel Saints who are viewed as nonconformist. But I believe the time is near when we will face ecological, economic, social, and political crises on a global scale. I believe that, as times get harder, those foundational values of loyalty, solidarity, humility, humanity, and discipline will stand us in good stead again. The sooner we come to see value, not in conformity but in diversity, the more successfully we will be able to work together in coping with the coming challenges. If we do not learn these values now, we will be forced to learn them later, just as the Saints of the nineteenth century were forced to learn them in Kirtland, Missouri, Illinois, and on the Great Plains.

The conventional values that prevail in America, grounded as they are in concepts of enlightened self-interest, will not enable us to make the kinds of sacrifices that will be required of us to meet the challenges of the coming millennium. I believe the values embedded in LDS scripture, teachings, and practice *will* prepare us, to the extent that we internalize and live them. Conventional American values tend to encourage us to strive for good, but only as long as the pursuit of goodness does not interfere with our own personal pursuit of happiness. Conventional American values tend to encourage philanthropy, but not sacrifice. Conventional attitudes toward sexual morality tend to focus on self-fulfillment, rather than on loyalty to the other. Such values can only take us so far.

Gay and lesbian Latter-day Saints currently have an opportunity to learn these lessons in ways that other Latter-day Saints do not. We know what it is like to be excluded for no reason other than who we are. Even in

wards where we experience a relative degree of welcome, we face constant misunderstanding. To the extent that we wish to participate in the LDS community, we are required to cultivate an unusual degree of patience and humility. If we learn to accept these burdens with equanimity and if we can, despite them, seek out opportunities for service, I am convinced that such service will prepare us for a much more important work in coming years.

* * *

Some will accuse me of picking and choosing which commandments I want to obey. I hope that more thoughtful people will understand that I am seeking a way forward through a complex and difficult issue, a way that can succeed in drawing real people to the Church, rather than utterly alienating them or driving them to despair and suicide. A truly gospel-oriented approach will not promote the all-or-nothing proposition that gay people must either live in full conformity with current Church standards or that they must live in a state of promiscuity and alienation. As long as our straight brothers and sisters have no interest in lifelong celibacy, rather than condemning gay Saints for their unwillingness to commit to it, we need to celebrate and support decisions to embrace and live as many of the principles of the gospel as possible. Surely the wider Church, gay and lesbian people themselves, their families, friends, and loved ones, and the communities they live in all have a vested interest in promoting moral choices, spiritual living, and a constructive, nurturing relationship with the Church, even if they do so under conditions that are not ideal. On the other hand, a willingness to accept and promote progress, even when it falls short of the ideal, is a hallmark of the Christian virtues of patience, hope, faith, and compassion. It reflects the vision that by entering into constructive relationships and making improvements today, we are taking a road that will some day lead to better and greater goods tomorrow until, in a time and a place currently hidden from our view, we enter the perfect realm.

We especially need to embrace those who make the very difficult decision to attend meetings regularly and participate in worship in places where previously they have experienced alienation, rejection, and denigration. We need to trust that, when an individual chooses to attend church, it is usually a sign that the Spirit is at work in that person's life. Even if an individual is unable to be received into formal membership and cannot

take the sacrament, be ordained to priesthood office (if male), accept ward callings, or attend the temple, a rich spiritual life can still be fostered through meeting attendance, prayer, scripture study, and service. It is impossible for me to see why such involvement should not be creatively fostered in every way imaginable, perhaps even developing new and unique programs to address specific needs of gay and lesbian Saints.

For gay and lesbian Saints, such a course will require a special kind of patience. It is extremely difficult to participate wholeheartedly in a community in which there is a painful history. Sometimes it may be necessary to take time away. It can seem unbearable to participate actively in a community where you encounter constant comments or behavior that make you feel inferior. Even if we make the Promethean sacrifice of lifelong celibacy, in a Church where the highest callings are available only to those who are married and where there is such a huge focus on families, in wards where we sit alone in the pews while others are accompanied by a spouse and children, it will be hard not to feel inferior in some fundamental way. If, on the other hand, we choose a relationship with a significant other of the same sex, the feelings of inferiority that can flow from the fact of being excommunicated and excluded from partaking of the sacrament, from Church callings, and from temple service may overwhelm any remaining sense of connection to our Church.

The only way any of us can remain committed under these circumstances, I believe, is through an intimate relationship with God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The only reason I have entered into this path is because the Spirit drew me into it. My ongoing relationship with the Spirit reassures me of God's infinite love for me, of my infinite value to God, and of the unique role I have to play in the unfolding of God's kingdom, even if that role is not understood by my heterosexual brothers and sisters. The Spirit reminds me that the indignities I suffer in this life cannot detract from my relationship with God or frustrate my ultimate destiny as God's child. The Spirit reminds me that there is nothing under heaven that can stand between me and the love of God. And that love is constantly calling me—and all of us—into a deeper relationship with God and with God's Church. The Spirit testifies to me that the Church is true, that its leaders are called by God and inspired, and that they hold the keys of authority to establish God's kingdom here below. To affirm these beliefs enhances my humanity as a child of God; it does not detract from it. The Spirit also testifies to me that even when I feel excluded from the

great stream of activity in the Church, I am not excluded in any ultimate sense, so long as I remain as faithful as I possibly can under the constraints within which I am called to live now.

* * *

I also believe that we gay and lesbian Saints are not the only ones being tried. As I complete the writing of this essay, I have reflected on my recent experience at the national convention of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, in Portland, Oregon. I was struck by the depth of faith and love I saw exhibited in so many gay Latter-day Saints who have had to struggle too often all alone. It was heartbreaking to contemplate how many have been forced to find a way with no support from the one institution so many of us have given our whole hearts and lives to. While some of us are gradually seeing our families become supportive (I am blessedly one of these), almost all of us have suffered alienation from our families for at least some time or to some extent. Many of us are still cut off from the one group of people we were taught by the Church to expect unconditional love from. Despite the painful isolation and misunderstanding many of us have experienced, I am amazed at how many of us have clung to our moral compass; at how many of us have clung to the basic principles of love, tenderness, patience, mercy, humility, forgiveness, compassion, and, yes, even chastity; how many of us have found that even when we were all alone, if we turned to God, God was there for us and was willing to guide us in our journeys.

Among my brothers and sisters at Affirmation, I witnessed much alienation from the Church and anger at its leaders. But I do not believe this alienation and anger are because we hate the Church or do not value it. It is because of the opposite: because we loved the Church with our whole hearts. If many of us dared to admit our love, the pain and sadness of being so profoundly alienated from the one institution that has provided so much meaning and hope in our lives can feel almost too great to bear. It feels as if the sadness will swallow us up. Part of the reason I have written this is because I have learned that, by opening ourselves to the love we feel not only for God and for our families but for our Church as well, we can discover new depths of joy. I have discovered that if we open ourselves to engage, the Spirit will walk every step of this journey with us.

I am gradually learning that there is only one characteristic that ultimately can make us godlike, and it is love. Every other virtue flows out of

love. We believe, even against incredible odds, because we love. We obey because we love. We reserve our sexual expression for the right time and the right place and the right person because we love. We forgive because we love. We give thanks because we love. We wait in patience and hope because we love.

The practice of love in all its manifestations refines and perfects our souls. It is what prepares us for the eternities. As we pass through the fires of adversity in this life and as we come in the next life to the watchers and guardians who keep the way into eternal life, it is love that will teach us the signs and the passwords that can bring us back to our Heavenly Father and Mother. Love is what will enable God to recognize us as his children and enable us to recognize God as our Father. Love, not the incidents of mortality, is what will train us to become divine parents in the next life.

Learning all of the dimensions of divine love—love of God, love of neighbor, love of parents, love of enemies, and intimate love of one’s life partner—is, I believe, what this life is all about. That is why I suspect the Spirit prompts me to continue to nurture my love for my partner. It is why those gay men and women who have renounced intimate love to claim the love of Church fellowship—even in a Church that for the most part does not understand them—have discovered a path of love that will surely save them as well. It is also why I believe we should support in whatever way we can the love of men and women who have chosen to negotiate the difficult dynamics that arise when spouses are of different sexual orientations. The choice to love should always be supported. Love is too grand, too large, too divine for any one of us to learn every aspect of it in this life. This is why we need to come together as a Church: to see love reflected in the lives of others. Only by learning as much of it as we can will we be ready for everything God has prepared for us.

Notes

1. I’ve described this experience in more detail in John D. Gustav-Wrathall, “The Tug of Home,” Letter to the Editor, *Sunstone*, Issue 139 (November 2005): 2–4, and John D. Gustav-Wrathall, “A Gay Mormon’s Testimony,” *Sunstone*, Issue 141 (April 2006): 52–57.

2. There has been a fair amount of discussion in print about whether to use the terms “gay” and “lesbian,” “same-sex attraction,” “same-gender attraction,” or “homosexuality.” Part of the difficulty of choosing one term over another is that they each connote slightly different things, which highlights one of the historic difficulties in discussing this topic: We’re not all agreed on the

exact nature of the phenomenon we're talking about. One of the reasons "gay" has been rejected by those who prefer "same-sex attraction" or "same-gender attraction" is that it supposedly connotes a "lifestyle" which they reject. Among those who self-identify as "gay," however, the term does not generally connote any particular lifestyle but is simply used to describe anyone who is sexually attracted exclusively to members of the same sex. This includes individuals who have not admitted their sexual orientation to themselves or others, who are celibate, who are heterosexually married, etc. Another objection to the term "gay" is that using it implies that one's whole existence is defined by it. Again, most who use this term to describe themselves see gayness as nothing more than a characteristic, like "white," "left-handed," "middle-aged," "American," "Mormon," etc. That is why turning the adjective "gay" into a noun (eg., "gays") is generally frowned upon, while continuing to use "gay" as an adjective is preferred (e.g., "gay man," "gay Latter-day Saint," etc.). I prefer the term "gay," though I am not uncomfortable with other terms.

3. Cloy Jenkins et al., *Prologue: An Examination of the Mormon Attitude toward Homosexuality* (Los Angeles: Prometheus Enterprises, 1978).

4. Gary T. Horlacher, "Religion and Sexual Orientation in Conflict: Changing Values of Same-Sex Oriented Mormons," Paper presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) Conference, Portland, Oregon, October 19–21, 2006. I also discussed Horlacher's research with him in person. Horlacher contacted his interviewees through organizations such as Evergreen International, Family Fellowship, Reconciliation, Gamofites, and Affirmation. His participants were self-selected and may therefore not have been representative of Mormon gay men and lesbians as a whole.

5. Erin Eldridge, *Born That Way? A True Story of Overcoming Same-Sex Attraction with Insights for Friends, Families, and Leaders* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994). Because "Erin Eldridge" is a pseudonym, there has been some controversy about whether she is a real person. David Pruden, executive director of Evergreen International, claimed to know her personally and stated that, as of this writing, "she and her husband are currently expecting their third child." David Pruden, "Just the Facts," August 5, 2006, Evergreen International's website, http://www.evergreeninternational.org/Just_the_Facts.htm (accessed September 11, 2006).

6. Gordon B. Hinckley, "What Are People Asking about Us?" *Ensign*, November 1998, 70.

7. Fred and Marilyn Matis and Ty Mansfield, *In Quiet Desperation: Un-*

Understanding the Challenge of Same-Gender Attraction (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004).

8. *Ibid.*, 228–30.

9. Elders Dallin H. Oaks and Lance B. Wickman, interviewed by LDS Public Relations, “Same Gender Attraction,” August 2006, <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/issues/answer/0,19491,6056-1-202-4-202,00.html> (accessed August 22, 2006).

10. Ben Christensen, “Getting Out/Staying In: One Mormon Straight/Gay Marriage,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 121–32.

11. Lester J. Leavitt, *Forbidden Friends*, 2d ed. (Self-published, 2006), PDF in my possession courtesy of Lester Leavitt.

12. Lester J. Leavitt, Email to John Gustav-Wrathall, December 24, 2006.

13. Gustav-Wrathall, “Gay Mormon’s Testimony.”

14. John D. Gustav-Wrathall, “Homosexuality and LDS Faith,” Paper presented at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, August 9–12, 2006.

15. John D. Wrathall, “Sexual Terrorism,” *Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance* 3 (1997): 166–82; see also Gustav-Wrathall, “Gay Mormon’s Testimony.”

16. Matis, Matis, and Mansfield, *In Quiet Desperation*, 63–64.

17. Boyd K. Packer, “Covenants,” *Ensign*, November 1990, 84; No author, “Understanding and Helping Those Who Have Homosexual Problems: Suggestions for Ecclesiastical Leaders,” pamphlet (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992); Hinckley, “What Are People Asking about Us?”; Dallin H. Oaks, “Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign*, October 1995, 7–14; Gordon B. Hinckley, Interview with Larry King, “Larry King Live,” CNN, December 26, 2004, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0472/26/lkl.09.html> (accessed December 15, 2006); Oaks and Wickman, “Same Gender Attraction.”

18. Oaks and Wickman, “Same Gender Attraction.”

19. Although the language in the interview is very male-oriented, one assumes that Elders Oaks and Wickman would view their comments as applying to both men and women. It seems reasonable to assume, for instance, that women with same-gender attraction are encouraged to marry only if they “feel a great attraction” for a “son of God.” *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. Christensen, “Getting Out/Staying In,” 150–51.

22. Marybeth Raynes and Erin Parsons, “Single Cursedness: An Overview of LDS Authorities’ Statements about Unmarried People,” in *Multiply*

and Replenish: *Mormon Essays on Sex and Family*, edited by Brent Corcoran (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 217–30; and Delmont R. Oswald, “A Lone Man in the Garden,” in *ibid.*, 231–38.

23. Matis, Matis, and Mansfield, In *Quiet Desperation*, 228–30.

24. Robert A. Rees, “Between Suicide and Celibacy,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 208–17.

25. Stuart Matis, quoted in Matis, Matis, and Mansfield, In *Quiet Desperation*, 19.

26. In Protestant and Catholic circles, discussion about homosexuality has focused on five or six biblical texts that have historically been used to condemn homosexuality. Discussion has also centered on the natural order and God’s intention for creation. The biblical texts in question include two Leviticus texts (18:22, 20:13) that describe it as an abomination for a “man to lie with a man as with a woman.” Discussion about this text has concentrated on whether it is appropriate to apply portions of the Levitical purity code when Christians believe the Levitical law was superseded in Christ. The Sodom and Gomorrah story in Genesis 19 about an incident of threatened homosexual rape has occasionally been used as proof of God’s wrath toward homosexuals, though liberal interpreters have pointed out that the scene merely illustrated the inhospitality and wickedness of the Sodomites in threatening to rape an angelic messenger and cannot be used to generalize about consensual, committed same-sex relationships. Romans 1:26–28 describes those who forsake “natural affections” as examples of what happens when one turns away from the Creator. Liberals have questioned the application of Paul’s term “against nature” to those who, by nature, are born gay or lesbian, and have pointed out that many gay men and lesbians devoutly worship the Creator. Finally, two catalogs of sins in 1 Corinthians 6:9–12 and 1 Timothy 1:8–10 that condemn effeminacy and sexual perversion have been seen as a condemnation of homosexuality, though the translations of the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* as “homosexual” in these texts has been disputed. See Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?: A Positive Christian Response* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994); James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978); John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); John Shelby Spong, *Living in Sin?: A Bishop Re-thinks Human Sexuality* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990); John Boswell, *Same-Sex Unions in Premodern Europe* (New York: Villard Books, 1994).

27. See Wayne Schow, "Homosexuality, Mormon Doctrine, and Christianity: A Father's Perspective," *Sunstone*, February 1990, 9–12; Ron Schow, Wayne Schow, and Marybeth Raynes, *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991); and the following four articles from *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*: Gary M. Watts, "The Logical Next Step: Affirming Same-Sex Relationships," 31, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 49–57; Robert A. Rees, "'In a Dark Time the Eye Begins to See': Personal Reflections on Homosexuality among the Mormons at the Beginning of a New Millennium," 33, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 137–51; Wayne Schow, "Sexual Morality Revisited," 37, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 114–36; and Ron Schow, "Homosexual Attraction and LDS Marriage Decisions," 38, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 133–43. There is no mention of homosexuality (either implicit or explicit) in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, or the Pearl of Great Price. Obviously, however, heterosexual marriage plays a much more elevated role in LDS theology than in Protestant or Catholic theology.

28. See especially Watts, "The Logical Next Step," and Schow, "Sexual Morality Revisited."

29. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction"; The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102; Oaks and Wickman, "Same-Gender Attraction."

30. Don Bradley, "The Grand Fundamental Principles of Mormonism': Joseph Smith's Unfinished Reformation," *Sunstone*, Issue 141 (April 2006): 32–41; Van Hale, "Exploring the Mind of Joseph Smith on LDS Diversity," Paper presented at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, August 9–12, 2006. The portraits in these papers of the Prophet's tolerance of doctrinal latitude and simultaneous insistence on personal loyalty are consistent with the conclusions of other biographers, including Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1977), see esp. chap. 13, "Dissent in Nauvoo"; Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), esp. chap. 2, "The First Five Presiding Priesthood Quorums," 39–77, and chap. 3, "Theocratic Beginnings," 79–103; Richard Lyman Bushman with the assistance of Jed Woodworth, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), esp. chap. 24, "Temporalities and Spiritualities," 417–35, chap. 26, "Perils," 459–81, and chap. 27, "Thickets," 482–99. Joseph's vision of freedom of conscience was breathtaking for his day. For example, Michael Quinn, *Origins of Power*, 107–8, documents how Joseph's Nauvoo was one of the first American cities to extend full religious freedom to Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims. But Joseph also had a concern for personal loyalty that verged on paranoia, illus-

trated by his formation of a secret police force in Nauvoo in 1843. *Ibid.*, 116–17.

31. D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); and Rocky O'Donovan, "The Abominable and Detestable Crime against Nature': A Brief History of Homosexuality and Mormonism," in *Multiply and Replenish*, 123–70.