

A Case for Same-Sex Marriage: Reply to Randolph Muhlestein

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I come at this topic primarily from an existential rather than from an ideological position. I had a son who was gay. Brad came out to his mother and me when he was twenty. At that time, I could hardly have been more viscerally antipathetic to homosexuals, and so accepting his assertion was simply unthinkable. Since he was an upstanding young man—good student, good citizen, good Latter-day Saint—since I perceived our family relationships as healthy, and since I loved him, I was determined to help him understand that he was just temporarily mixed up and that he could overcome his delusions. He, on the other hand, was fiercely determined to help me understand his reality; and however difficult I might find that, he wanted desperately to believe that ultimately I could be open-minded and fair.

In the educational struggle that ensued over the next eight years before his death from AIDS, he proved to be the prevailing teacher. I read the best literature on the subject I could find; I studied the views of professionals; I allowed myself to get to know and observe many homosexuals and their family members, and to hear their stories; above all, I listened to and watched Brad and tried to view the matter as clearly as I could from his point of view. In the long run, he moved me nearly 180 degrees.

My long-standing bias against homosexual persons was a result of my having absorbed from my religious and social culture a number of closed premises—without bothering to examine them. As I did the work of fact-finding, observation, and analysis—and as I looked hard at my religious principles to determine which of them were really relevant to this matter—little by little the problematic aspects of homosexuality mostly

melted away. Now I find it hard to believe that I once found this natural phenomenon so threatening, so intolerable.

Brad had gone to live in West Hollywood because he felt like an outcast in Idaho and Utah. (This was in 1979.) He wanted to explore his sexual identity in an accepting environment, where he and others like him could live openly. Unfortunately, he arrived in California just as the AIDS epidemic was beginning and before it had been identified. He contracted the virus. After several years, he returned to Utah to study. But by then it was too late. And so he came home finally, living with us for his last nineteen months as AIDS, now ascendant, completed its deadly work.

As a young adult, what he had desperately wanted was to find a committed male companion with whom he could fashion a stable, settled life. But nothing in the social or religious structures around him in Pocatello, Salt Lake City, and Logan encouraged or supported that. Quite the contrary.

I so wish fair treatment of homosexual persons, including the possibility of gay marriage, had been available to Brad here in Mormon country a quarter century ago. Had it been, had we all not put stumbling blocks in his path, I think he would not have gone to Los Angeles when he did, might well as a result have avoided contracting AIDS, and been still with us today, he and a partner together, working in their professions, contributing to society, experiencing the fulfilling life that would have been possible. I am haunted still by what might have been. I regret that, at that crucial time, I lacked the vision and the courage to stand up for him.

I state this personal history in fairness to the reader, who can decide for him- or herself if my objectivity has been compromised or strengthened by what I have lived and learned.

I

The casual reader who is already predisposed to disapprove of gay marriage will find much appealing in Randolph Muhlestein's argument. On the surface, the latter seems judicious and fair-minded. He takes some pains to avoid the appearance of naive or mean-spirited bias. He makes his case in a civil and restrained fashion. He has done background reading and credited his sources.¹ Like any reasonable man, he acknowledges opposing arguments, frequently admits the limits of his evidence, and mostly avoids claiming more than it will support.

And yet, for all its academic polish, this argument (given my own

persuasions) seems based on narrow readings of secondary sources, on readings and interpretations primarily driven by *a priori* assumptions. At the same time, it ignores significant issues such as fairness and compassion. And ultimately, it is not sufficiently based on primary evidence—in this case direct, careful, extended observation of the real lives of homosexuals. As I appraise it, this article is substantially speculative, its heavily qualified conclusions influenced by fearful assumptions.

If I were asked to describe the principal difference between Muhlestein's approach to this subject and mine, I would say that he is most concerned with how to protect society from homosexuals, while I am most focused on our moral obligation to treat gays and lesbians justly and compassionately.

Muhlestein lays out his argument in terms of (1) constitutional considerations, (2) scriptural authority, and (3) sociological and scientific issues. In the brief section devoted to the first topic, he summarizes the current status of same-sex marriage in the courts, where proponents seem to be making slow but steady progress toward general legalization. Acknowledging that there is no simple way to refute "eloquent" and even "poetic" legal opinions that would justify same-sex marriage in the light of constitutional decisions, he falls back on his own rule of thumb for judicial interpretation: first, would the framers of the constitution(s) "roll over in their graves" if same-sex marriage were found constitutional? And second, would a "significant portion of the population" be "outrage[d]" by such an interpretation? (4)

As Muhlestein explains clearly, constitutions are not fixed in stone. They must be living documents, interpreted and reinterpreted by the judiciary as time passes, as conditions and contexts evolve. If, for example, we wish to speculate about what the framers of the Constitution of the United States would think concerning gay marriage, we should imagine them living not at the end of the eighteenth but rather at the beginning of the twenty-first century, informed by intervening history and contemporary perspectives. I am no lawyer, but my conjecture is that they'd see the matter governed by such inalienable rights as personal "liberty" and the "pursuit of happiness."

As to whether a decision to allow gay marriage might offend a significant majority of today's population, Muhlestein knows well that the framers of our national constitution were much concerned to defuse the potential for a tyrannous majority to impose, unnecessarily and unjustly, on

the interests of minorities. That's why they instituted checks and balances, so that the judiciary could restrain when appropriate not only a zealous, self-interested majority but also their self-interested legislative representatives. And when is such restraint appropriate? When rights or freedoms of minorities are restricted without there being a compelling governmental interest to do so. In my view, no such compelling interest has been convincingly demonstrated by the opponents of gay marriage, including Muhlestein.

Moreover, he should remember that public majority opinion is not a constant. The poll results relative to gay unions that he points to have been changing steadily in recent years, with increasing numbers of respondents shifting to acceptance of gay unions. Frankly, I'm not much impressed by poll results; polls typically oversimplify complex issues, and they invite knee-jerk responses devoid of informed reflection. But if we must have polls, let's revisit the numbers a year or two or five from now and see where we are. Almost certainly, the anti-gay marriage faction will have lost more support.

Ultimately, Muhlestein acknowledges that his legal argument against gay marriage comes down mostly to his belief that the will of the voting majority (currently dominated by the politically energized religious right) should prevail.

The second element of the Muhlestein argument is based on a literal interpretation of several scriptural verses. The most important of them are Jesus's pronouncement that a man and his wife should cleave unto each other and several biblical texts that condemn homosexual intercourse. He therefore concludes that to sanctify sexual relations of any other sort outside heterosexual marriage is (in essence) to "mock God."²

To interpret scripture literally and simplistically—making no allowance for cultural contexts, regarding every scriptural pronouncement as binding for all time—is, generally speaking, to stand on shaky ground. None but an extreme fundamentalist can seriously adopt such a posture. Read the Pentateuch in its entirety and see how unacceptable, according to current values, are many of its prohibitions and draconian punishments. Note that some of the most respected historical figures in the Old Testament had multiple wives and concubines. Note the omnipresent bias against women; note the acceptance of slavery; consider Paul's unfavorable view of marriage. Examples are legion. There is no need to belabor the obvious here.

Thus, a couple of proof-texts from the Bible (read without consideration of situational and cultural contexts) alluding to improper homosexual expression provide no authoritative foundation for denying gay marriage in our time and place. This is particularly true given that, in that earlier culture, homosexual orientation was not generally understood as a given in some persons' nature, as expert opinion now widely regards it. Furthermore, biblical culture apparently never considered the possibility of a committed, monogamous, life-time partnership between two homosexuals.

Muhlestein can hardly do other than acknowledge (as he does) that the literal scriptural references to homosexuality are insufficient of themselves to convince educated religionists, let alone those outside the Judeo-Christian persuasion, and that if the case against same-sex marriage is to prevail, it must find other, persuasive legs to stand on. (A broader appeal to scripture for guidance in this matter is, however, not irrelevant, as I will attempt to show.)

Thus, we come to the main thrust of Muhlestein's argument—based on sociological/scientific assessment—with its two propositions: (1) that same-sex marriage would damage the institution of traditional marriage; and (2) that it would encourage more people to “adopt a homosexual lifestyle” (7). Muhlestein goes to great lengths to establish that the institution of marriage is good for society. He is carrying coals to Newcastle. Who's contesting that? Certainly not the proponents of gay marriage. While the purposes, forms, and expectations associated with marriage have varied not a little over time and in various cultures,³ it has adapted and persisted because in general it promotes social stability and at the same time promotes good outcomes in individual lives.

But viewed from near perspective, this venerable institution seems to be in troubled straits, with relatively fewer people marrying and more marriages failing. Documenting the diminished appeal and health of marriage in the United States, Muhlestein rightly acknowledges that this decline derives from numerous causes. These include the shift from a rural to an increasingly urban economy; the women's movement, with greater educational and employment opportunities for women, enabling them to reject undesired marriages or escape abusive marriages; changing social attitudes regarding unmarried cohabitation and divorce (including the rise of romantic love as a principal basis for marrying, and its lack as sufficient reason, for many, for dissolving marriages); changes in the law allowing

no-fault divorce and equal legal recognition of illegitimate children; development of more reliable methods of birth control and the sexual revolution that in part resulted from it; upward spiraling materialism and the stresses induced by it (two incomes often needed for families to survive or to achieve a higher standard of consumerism); and a gradual decline of perceived theological authority.

If the props that supported traditional marriage have been steadily weakened or removed, gays deserve very little of the blame—and Muhlestein indirectly acknowledges as much. Nevertheless, by denying them access to marriage, he would make them pay a price for the woes of marriage as practiced by heterosexuals. Would gay marriage really have a negative effect on traditional marriage? “Nobody knows,” he concedes (13). Nevertheless, he reasons, since past changes (however unrelated to homosexuality) have created some problems for marriage (he does not mention that they have fixed some as well), let’s not allow any other change. It just *might* also have a negative effect, neither “small [n]or salutary” (13). Don’t bother to consider the particular merits of a proposed change. Let’s not, in other words, attack the real causes for this dip in the popularity of marriage or acknowledge we can’t reverse the historical clock. Instead, let’s pick on the by-standing homosexuals who would very much like a place at the marriage table, the bounties of which they respect. Let’s make a show of pointedly excluding them and forget about real cause and effect.

Well, says Muhlestein, at a minimum, gay marriage would further dissociate marriage from procreation and child-rearing, it might adversely affect the birthrate, and it would give offense to conservative religionists by moving marriage further from the “irrevocable, God-ordained covenant model” (13). Applying some epistemological analysis to that claim of an “irrevocable, God-ordained covenant model” would be useful, and a fruitful place to begin might be the scripturally sanctioned ancient and modern practice of polygamy.

The first of Muhlestein’s objections is indeed a slippery slope. Think of all the heterosexual marriages that, from the outset, are justified on grounds other than procreation—couples who consciously enter marriage choosing not to have children, or couples known to be infertile, or older persons beyond child-bearing years—yet they marry with the unambiguous blessing of Church and society because marriage has other undeniable benefits—emotional, practical, legal—that justify their unions and improve their lives.

As for child-rearing, the typical male/female pattern of parenting does not guarantee good parenting, as many a messed-up adult, looking back, will readily testify. On the other hand, in the challenging real (as opposed to “ideal”) world, children are often reared successfully in “irregular” situations and always have been. The significant variable is not the gender of the nurturing adults so much as the cohesiveness of the family environment and the quality of care, love, commitment, responsible instruction, and good examples the child experiences while growing up. Most reputable academic studies of outcomes for children in gay-parented households conclude that statistically such children do as well as those in families with male/female parents.⁴ Moreover, many of those who would enter gay marriages either already are parents or wish to be, so there would be no necessary dissociation of marriage and child-rearing.

What about Muhlestein’s argument that gay marriage would negatively impact the birthrate? If gay marriage were optional and gay families were officially recognized as families, how many heterosexual couples would decide, for that reason, not to have children? The answer is obvious.⁵ Would the birthrate drop measurably because a few gays, with society’s acceptance, decided to forego heterosexual unions, many of which would be doomed to dissolve or be otherwise unsatisfactory, and enter into same-sex unions? Any decline so occasioned would surely be insignificant.

Furthermore, Muhlestein’s fears that the availability of marriage to gays would make the “gay lifestyle” so attractive that considerable numbers of straight people “might” gravitate to it are unfounded. Only those who genuinely are strongly homosexual will so identify themselves and choose gay marriage. Concern, then, about depressing the birthrate is simply a red herring.⁶

As for gay marriage giving offense to some members of America’s conservative churches, I suggest that those so offended would do well to reexamine the basic tenets of the faith they profess, to which subject I will return.

If we stand back and look carefully at Muhlestein’s polemic, it is possible to see what he is most concerned about: that legalizing gay marriage would likely encourage more people “to adopt a homosexual lifestyle”⁷—and he is just not comfortable with that prospect. He continues: “I suspect that . . . most Americans . . . would prefer . . . that their children not adopt a homosexual lifestyle, and that there not be a dramatic increase in the

numbers of homosexuals generally.” And then he adds, significantly, “I believe that there is good sense in these common attitudes” (7). Why does he add that judgment? As I read his argument, he feels the need to insist that, however much gays must be tolerated, what they *are* is undesirable, bad for society—and it would be best not to encourage them in any significant way.

I must call out that statement for what I think it reveals: sheer prejudice. To say that our country would be better off without increased numbers of homosexuals betrays a bias that exists prior to any concern about marriage *per se*. It shows a failure to recognize that homosexuals support society in the same valuable ways, and in similar degrees, that heterosexuals do. It fails to see that their special sensibilities enable them to make strong contributions particularly—but by no means exclusively—in the helping professions (including teaching, medicine, health, counseling) and the occupational fields of design and the arts. It fails to acknowledge typical, ordinary homosexual persons as hard-working, law-abiding, decent citizens.

I am pained to make this charge of prejudice, but I cannot think that, in the final analysis, it is unwarranted. I believe that for many who oppose gay marriage the issue is not primarily about the institution of marriage *per se*. Defense of traditional marriage is just a symbolic flash-point fueled by what really drives this initiative—a visceral rejection of homosexuality in toto, a denial of its right to be, a disgust at an expression of sexuality and sensibility that is different from the majority.

Short of declaring straight out that homosexual persons are fundamentally flawed and anti-socially oriented, what basis can Muhlestein propose for walling them out, excluding them from rights and opportunities (including marriage) that are commonly available to Americans? His somewhat strained argument is, in effect, to disclaim the importance of biology as a causal factor, to challenge homosexual identity as inborn essence, to assert rather (or at least imply continually) that it is predominantly historically, socially, culturally constructed and thus theoretically susceptible to alteration. And since homosexuality is “adopted” (his word [26])—i.e., deliberately acquired rather than innate—homosexuals neither need nor deserve any recognition of their claims to be different. So why should they be allowed to enter into marriage with one of their own gender? The centrality of this claim as the cornerstone of his argument against gay marriage is evident in that he employs well over half of his essay

attempting to substantiate it. His sustained effort does not persuade me because it is not pursued consistently or evenhandedly.

Muhlestein reviews various attempts over the past century and a half to formulate the etiology of homosexuality. These attempted explanations have been inadequate because, without exception, they failed to account for relevant phenomena related to this complex matter. These outmoded theories are straw men, easily and justifiably knocked over. He then focuses his attention exclusively on what he takes to be the current prevailing theory: genetic linkage to sexual orientation. In particular, he cites the research efforts directed by Dean Hamer, whose line of investigation is still a painstaking work in progress, highly suggestive at this juncture but with questions still to be answered. Muhlestein seems willing to acknowledge a growing consensus among investigators about the relevance of gene theory. As he puts it, “Many other studies [also] suggest that there is a genetic link of one kind or another for male sexual orientation” (18). Notwithstanding, Muhlestein ultimately dismisses genetic implications⁸ and declares the essentialist theory of homosexuality “surprisingly weak” because “scientists and theorists have been unable to devise a satisfactory scientific or medical theory that explains homosexuality as *wholly* the result of genes, germs, accidents, or other factors that are independent of culture” (16; emphasis mine). He subsequently restates this conclusion even more strongly: “The scientific evidence suggests that the essentialist view of sexual orientation is *wrong* because sexual orientation, unlike race, disability, or age, is not *wholly* determined by genes, germs, the passage of time, or other uncontrollable factors” (21; emphasis mine).

At this point, Muhlestein’s argument falls into either inadvertent contradiction or obfuscation. He equates biological causes with essentialism, then dismisses essentialism unless biology is the exclusive cause. In spite of his attempt to avoid it, in considering causes of homosexuality he seems at times to fall into the trap of either/or thinking. Either the essentialist etiology is “wholly” the explanation, or it must yield to environmental/cultural causes—which he assumes (perhaps wrongly) are less compelling.

“Indeed,” he says, “the scientific theory of homosexuality that is currently most popular allows for a major role for culture and environment” (16). This position actually implies the existence of biological determinants, even given varying definitions about “major.” Muhlestein’s statement frames the matter misleadingly. While it is true that some leading

experts now describe the etiology of homosexuality as complex, possibly involving multiple causes, I know of no one at the forefront of such investigation who dismisses the importance of biology as a significant influence or determinant in a majority of cases.

The reality is that even if several causes contribute, those which may be called essentialist can still have an unavoidable, and very often the dominant, impact. That is, if one is born with sensibilities or proclivities that incline one powerfully toward a particular orientation, environmental/cultural influences may well reinforce such inborn tendencies. Thus, the multiple-cause theory that Muhlestein espouses (which includes essentialist elements) by no means invalidates the claim that biology is highly significant.

Muhlestein can't have it both ways. Either he must acknowledge candidly that biological determinants are real and present in at least some degree, or he must deny them outright. If he acknowledges them in any significant degree (as at times, in spite of himself, he seems to do), he undermines his own case.

In limiting his discussion of current etiological research to gene theory, Muhlestein omits important evidence. In fact, studies of the relationship of homosexuality and biology are ongoing in a number of other areas. These include hormones, anatomy, brain studies (focusing on both anatomy and function), cognitive studies, and birth order. In researching such complex questions, science moves with deliberate caution; nevertheless, some of the considerable work that has been done is very promising. Readers looking for larger perspective may wish to consult a website, "The Biology of Sexual Orientation," maintained by Simon LeVay, a noted biologist best known for his research on the brain and sexuality. This site provides an overview of theories and research, primarily but not exclusively biological, together with evaluative commentary. LeVay's summary statement reads: "Although quite a few of the findings reported here are inconsistent between studies or await independent replication, my general conclusion is that biological processes, especially the prenatal, hormonally controlled sexual differentiation of the brain, are likely to influence a person's ultimate sexual orientation."⁹

Will anyone who has looked carefully at a wide cross-section of gays and lesbians not admit that, in the case of the former, certain "feminized" physical and behavioral traits are more frequently found than in straight males, and similarly that among lesbians, certain "masculinized" traits are

more prevalent than among straight females?¹⁰ Even while acknowledging that such traits are stereotypical and admit of numerous exceptions, let it also be remembered that stereotypes generally have some real basis. Moreover, it will be observed that these traits generally are natural to their possessors, frequently observed from very early childhood, rather than deliberately cultivated or otherwise gradually acquired; it will be observed that one among several siblings, reared in the same family environment, exposed to the same educational and communal cultural values, will exhibit such gender-atypical behaviors and predilections while the others do not. My point is this: To deny that the statistically wide distribution of such gender-atypical physical and behavioral traits among homosexuals is natural to them and essential in their identity is naive.

What about the evidence of history? “It is clear from the historical record,” says Muhlestein, “that sexual attitudes, preferences, and practices among heterosexuals have varied widely over time and from place to place” (21). Furthermore, “studies suggest that sexual attitudes, preferences, and practices among homosexuals have, if anything, varied even more widely” (21–22). He then labors mightily to survey this sexual variety, concluding that the lack of consistency disproves any essentialist basis for homosexuality.

But this argument is a sword that cuts both ways. Let’s test his hypothesis by applying it to heterosexuals. Since their sexual attitudes and practices have been varied and inconsistent, influenced by culture, does he really mean seriously to suggest that heterosexuality is simply a social, historical, and/or cultural construct? that there is not something biologically innate—essential—in male/female sexual attraction where it widely exists? If indeed there is not, why should heterosexuality enjoy any special status? How, then, can anyone argue that heterosexuality is “natural”—as do most opponents of gay sexuality—and that it should be therefore the favored and exclusive basis for marriage? Muhlestein’s claims for the cultural construction of sexuality notwithstanding, I suspect he would acknowledge, if pressed, that a basic, inborn opposite-sex attraction (with all of its accompanying impulses for pair bonding) exists innately in most of the human population but that its private expression and the conditions under which that expression may be socially permissible will vary considerably based on cultural conditions and attitudes, as history has shown. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the same is true of homosexuality.

Muhlestein’s oversimplified interpretation of the historical record

can be seen in his lengthy reference to the research of Louis Crompton, which documents the widely varying degrees of tolerance and intolerance shown over the centuries toward homosexual behavior. Obviously Muhlestein's intent is to argue that, since cultures such as the ancient Spartans, the classical Chinese aristocracy, and the samurai and monastic cultures of pre-twentieth century Japan had well-established, accepted patterns of man/boy love (in the context of pedagogical training), and since certain homophobic periods of "Christian" culture brutally suppressed overt or suspected homosexuality to the point of its virtual apparent disappearance, these variations demonstrate that relative percentages of homosexuality in the population were not consistent. Thus (Muhlestein concludes), homosexuality could hardly derive from essentialist causes assumed to be consistent.

Two factors that Muhlestein does not acknowledge sufficiently help clarify these matters. First, there is an important distinction between sexual orientation (desires, fantasies, and yearnings which are largely innate and, especially in men, generally prove little subject to alteration of gender direction) and sexual behavior (which is susceptible to environmental influence and personal discipline). A person can be strongly homosexually oriented without necessarily expressing it in overt sexual behavior. Social or religious disapprobation may well motivate such suppression. Conversely, a person may, under certain circumstances, engage in homosexual behaviors without being predominantly homosexual in orientation. Social or religious acceptance of such behavior may encourage this. A corollary is that sexual orientation in general is more complex than simply either/or.

One of the most helpful aspects of the groundbreaking research of Alfred Kinsey and his associates was the development of the H-H scale, a seven-point continuum that recognized varying degrees of bisexuality in addition to straight heterosexual and straight homosexual orientation.¹¹ Thus, when cultures accept homosexual behaviors, such as those in which man/boy love was practiced with approval, it does not indicate a percentage increase in the numbers of strongly oriented homosexuals (5's and 6's on Kinsey's H-H Scale) as much as it demonstrates that many men are capable of relative degrees of bisexual behavior if that is culturally allowed.

Second, we need to recognize—far more than Muhlestein's parenthetical nod—the enormous suppressive effects of marginalization, ostracization, and even more violent forms of persecution and punish-

ment on historical manifestations of homosexual behavior. Same-sex attraction may be present in individuals, but how it is expressed, suppressed, or repressed will vary widely based on cultural attitudes, including social/religious tolerance or intolerance. Although the matter is virtually impossible to investigate, many biologists and psychologists assume that the percentage distribution of pronounced homosexual orientation (Kinsey Scale 5's and 6's) has been relatively consistent over time and across cultures. Their explanation for apparent declines in the manifestations of homosexuality is that, when punished—or otherwise severely sanctioned—homosexuals have tended to closet themselves to survive. Muhlestein claims that “there were very few lesbians in earlier times” (22) compared to the present, but how are we supposed to know that? Because there is little evidence in the written record? Any feminist will patiently explain to him the reasons why there were very few known women philosophers, clerics, poets, painters, scientists, or historians in earlier times—and how those reasons and small numbers might relate to lack of written evidence for the occurrence of lesbian desire.

In short, like his superficial look at early theoretical scientific explanations, Muhlestein's odd foray into Crompton's historical survey does not at all support his conclusion, namely, that “historical evidence for the nonessentialist view of sex in general, and sexual orientation in particular, is convincing” (27–28). Without heavy qualification, this conclusion is not at all convincing.

Muhlestein then considers what he calls subjective evidence, that is, the reporting by homosexuals, particularly males, about their personal perception of their erotic longing and their desire for physical and emotional intimacy. With a high level of consistency, they declare that the orientation of their desire is inherent, that it is not consciously chosen, that it often manifests itself at an early age and becomes clearer as they mature, and that their only real choice is between denying and/or suppressing those feelings or acknowledging and/or expressing them. Their coming to sexual awareness in these ways parallels that of heterosexuals. Muhlestein admits that “the subjective, or anecdotal, evidence for the essentialist approach to [homo]sexual orientation is strong, particularly for men” (16).

Indeed, to discount the weight of such self-perception by homosexuals—primary evidence, as it were—would demonstrate dubious judgment, as Muhlestein admits. But he then asserts that self-“knowledge” can be influenced by culture and environment and is therefore not “conclusively”

reliable. To illustrate his point, he cites an *Atlantic Monthly* story on “apotemnophilia” and “acrotomophilia,” respectively attraction to the condition of being an amputee and feeling sexual attraction toward amputees (28–30). Once these states of mind are named, publicized, and legitimized by experts, they become fashionable and attractive to increasing numbers of individuals. Muhlestein’s author apparently did not report on the numbers of apotemnophiliacs and acrotomophiliacs or provide documentation of the increasing trend over time. Muhlestein tentatively extends this analogy to homosexuality: i.e., the more widely homosexuality is recognized and legitimized, the more (he fears) that heterosexual individuals will find gayness emotionally appealing and declare themselves homosexual as a result.

I am amused by this analogy. I cannot read it as other than grasping at straws. If Muhlestein means seriously to suggest that vast numbers of genuinely, innately, heterosexual men and women would suddenly self-identify as homosexuals if gay marriage were allowed, then he ignores the general tendency of humans to choose the easier, more approved path when it is possible to do so. He must be positing a cascade of unspecified but powerful corollary changes in society. It is difficult to imagine that homosexuality would become a majority position; and if it remains a sharply defined minority, then the possible, almost predictable, social costs include prejudice, scorn, discrimination, rejection, and even violence. Doubtless, Muhlestein will counter that legitimating gay marriage will help to overcome that stigma and eliminate persecution, thereby making personal claims of homosexual identity much easier. Let us hope so, say I. But let us at the same time remain grounded in reality and acknowledge that legalizing gay marriage will not, in itself, overcome centuries of biased misunderstanding and rejection.

II

Born “that way”—or not? At one time, that question seemed the most crucial to me as I tried to sort out the theological implications of homosexuality. If this sexual orientation is substantially biologically imprinted and not a condition freely chosen, then assuming that God would impose a one-size-fits-all heterosexual set of expectations on gays would be patently wrong. And for the heterosexual majority to employ social and religious pressures in an attempt to “correct” this naturally occurring minority and force them into conformity with the mainstream would be unright-

teous dominion. Thus, it seemed to me of paramount importance to prove that biology was somehow the etiological explanation.

Now, although I still believe that biology has in most instances a pronounced—though perhaps not total—influence on homosexual orientation and that the still incomplete scientific evidence for this position will gradually be more firmly established, I am less concerned about pinpointing the exact cause(s). From my observation over some years of many homosexual persons, I have concluded that whether gay identity is a result of nature, nurture, or some combination doesn't really matter. What matters is that, for the great majority of homosexuals, the orientation of their desire for intimacy and erotic fulfillment is established, real, and strongly resistant to alteration.¹² Shouldn't they then be allowed to follow the life path that seems good to them and that brings them happiness if others are not adversely affected?

And so the crucial question then becomes: How can we, without prejudice but with justice and humane concern, create supportive conditions that give these brothers and sisters of ours their best opportunity to live happy, productive, fulfilled lives in this mortal span?

III

In his extended attempt to justify denying marriage to homosexual persons, Muhlestein ignores or minimizes some of the most powerful practical and moral arguments supporting it. Let's consider practical outcomes.

First, marriage, as experts agree, does promote stability in people's lives: better health, fewer risky behaviors, more satisfying sex lives, larger incomes, greater longevity, and in general greater happiness than single or divorced people (7). Stable lives mean fewer problems that society must deal with. Why, then, is it not in society's interest to make the stabilizing influence of marriage available to a significant minority that, not surprisingly, has suffered for want of it? If gays are statistically more subject to health risks and have higher rates of depression, addiction, and suicide, surely the lack of social acceptance and of equal opportunity for socially approved unions is partly responsible. Leveling the playing field would undoubtedly improve these conditions. Consider, for example, how the introduction of gay marriage has the potential of reducing sexual promiscuity among gays (as marriage reduces promiscuity among heterosexuals) and thereby reducing the spread of AIDS.

Second, with marriage in America declining in appeal and statistical success, it can use help from whatever quarter. Homosexuals constitute a minority that wishes to affirm this institution and its ideals. Contrary to the hue and cry raised by the extreme right, gays are not trying to dismantle marriage but rather to extend its stabilizing influence on society. By entering into it, they are attempting as individuals and as couples to be socially responsible. Religious conservatives should recognize this motivation and embrace proponents of gay marriage as allies. Why is that so hard to grasp?

Third, as Muhlestein observes in his lament for the current state of marriage: "In a majority of cases, the breakup of a traditional marriage is a bad thing, not just for any children involved, but also for the divorcing parties" (7). I agree. So why continue to encourage "mixed" traditional marriages between a gay and a heterosexual partner as our religious culture has done and continues to do implicitly. Such marriages, flawed from the outset, are typically a result of the Church's largely unqualified insistence on the importance of traditional marriage for everyone and its refusal to legitimize alternative sexual orientations and life patterns.

This problem is more widespread among Mormons than we care to acknowledge. These "mixed" marriages seem much more likely to end in divorce or, if they remain intact, are much less likely to provide marital satisfactions to both partners. Indeed, their negative outcomes typically cause pain and suffering for all involved, not least to the children of such unions. Nor is it in society's best interest to perpetuate such suffering. Would it not be fairer and more humane to legitimize a form of marriage that is more realistically attuned to the uniqueness of the individuals involved?

IV

In my mind, the moral reasons for supporting gay marriage loom even larger than the practical ones. There are several interwoven strands to the moral justification argument. I begin with the "self-evident" truths spelled out in our Declaration of Independence: the inalienable human rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Homosexuals driven to suicide deprive themselves of life. Gays and lesbians in the closet or discriminated against in employment, housing, and education lack significant components of liberty. And spending one's entire life dealing with

the social message that one is “wrong” and with the religious message that one is “bad” excludes happiness in decisive ways.

Aside from the specific benefits offered by marriage, access to marriage exemplifies for gays and lesbians the more general goals to which they aspire: respect, legitimacy, and recognition that this very important aspect of their being—the condition that *for whatever reason* is deeply imprinted in their sense of themselves—does not diminish them or make them second class. As a naturally occurring minority, they claim to be entitled equally to whatever rights and opportunities society can extend. In short, they are looking for their justified place at the table. And since they have no intent to disrupt the feast for the rest of us, nor do we have reasonable and realistic grounds to say that they would compromise our gustatory satisfaction, how can we then deny their request without compromising our own ideals of equity and fairness?¹³

If some say that, as they see it, the claim of homosexual orientation is questionable, that homosexual behavior is unacceptable, and that gays must not have the opportunity to marry, then surely their personal discomfort must be trumped by the right of homosexual persons to define themselves freely and to pursue happiness according to their own light, providing they do not impinge on the rights of their critics. This quintessentially American position cannot be denied without assaulting bedrock national values.

Moreover, since marriage is seen as a desirable state, granting homosexual persons access to its benefits is centrally consistent with the ethical teachings of all major religions. At the simplest level, that means being our brother’s and sister’s keeper; it means doing unto others as we would have others do unto us.

To understand why we are morally obliged to grant homosexuals the right to marry, we must look at the larger, central, complex role of sexuality in human lives.¹⁴ Whether or not we like to admit it, we are sexual beings. For most of us, sex is one of the most fascinating, mysterious, and challenging aspects of life. Like the Grand Canyon, it’s awesome, dazzlingly beautiful at times, powerfully inviting, and also potentially dangerous to negotiate. On the one hand, we are like lesser animals in the inescapability of our sexuality; on the other, we sense in it a godlike power. Mythology and folklore from earliest times and disparate cultures perceived this power and framed the creative acts of the gods in sexual metaphors. On some primordial level we know that sexuality is an energy that

underlies and drives creation. It is a basic human need, a basic human privilege. And so a life without sexual fulfillment is not a complete life, however good it otherwise may be.

Like any great force, sexuality—if rightly channeled—can bless our lives, but if uncontrolled it has as much potential for damage as for benefit. And thus, to minimize its destructive potential, codes of sexual morality come into being.

Some assume that sexual moral rules originate at some universal level of abstraction, that they were decreed in the beginning by God, more or less arbitrarily, as a test of obedience—“thou shalt not.” But if we look at historical evidence, we see the stages by which such moral codes have evolved based on human experience. The prohibitions they contain, including those laid down in scripture, are directly related to perceived negative effects of particular behaviors as they affect individuals, interpersonal relationships, and especially the welfare of the larger society. For example, adultery is forbidden in order to secure faithfulness and stability in the marriage relationship and thus reduce the disruptive social and psychological effects of sexual promiscuity. Fornication is forbidden because society needs to discourage relationships in which the participants are immature or otherwise unable to assume responsibility for the complex outcomes of sexual intimacy. Society doesn’t want to deal with the attendant problems. In short, sexual moral codes rest on the very *practical* relationship between acts and outcomes. To be moral, sex must be psychologically and socially responsible.

But sexual morality is not just a matter of “thou shalt not.” “Thou shalt not” is a blunt instrument, a negative, easy, and sometimes heavy-handed marker. If we believe that our sexuality is something more than inherent evil, if we see our sexual nature as a vital part of our humanness and as having the potential to raise us to a higher level of being, and if we would pursue the opportunity for growth inherent in this nature, we must surpass the Pharisaical letter of the law to find the more fulfilling and sublime positive aspects of sexual relationship with another.

God’s complex gift of sexuality, with its accompanying responsibilities, thus provides both opportunity and challenge. If its expression is selfish, if sensual gratification is its sole *raison d’être*, or if it reduces the partner simply to an object, it will likely lead to ennui, diminishment, and disillusionment. These are the results of immoral relationships. On the other hand, sex can be the ultimate expression of vulnerability, trust, and gener-

osity. Ideally, it focuses the desire to be fully present to another. As the primary ritual of interpersonal intimacy, it has the power to integrate the mysterious, soulful facets of human life. Through it, the reductive division of body and spirit can be transcended.¹⁵

It is natural, therefore, that sex should be fundamental in human bonding, a means that can solidify a joint search for fulfillment. Humans normally need acceptance and security, and these qualities are most powerfully fostered in intimate partnership. In a world that continually batters the self, each of us needs to know that another who cares deeply is there for us, to defend, counsel, encourage, and console us, and to share with us the dark as well as the light places on the mortal journey. For this reason, pairing is a normal desire, a normal need.

Heterosexual couples may not experience such companionship perfectly, but who in choosing to marry is not grateful for the chance to grow within this nurturing condition with society's unambiguous ritual blessing and continuing encouragement? How many married couples would falter were it not for that social support?

Why, then, should any of us who are not by inclination celibate, including homosexual persons, be asked to forego unnecessarily the opportunity to realize joy and growth through responsible shared sexuality if we are fortunate enough to find a loving, committed partner?

Can we find in scripture reliable guideposts to assist us as we consider our moral obligations in relation to these matters? While reductionist proof-texting without attention to historical and situational contexts provides no real help, the teachings of Jesus as we have them in the Gospels contain the bedrock on which legitimizing gay marriage can be justified. In what has been preserved, he said nothing about homosexuality directly, but indirectly and holistically, his teachings are filled with highly relevant tenets. Consider the following:

- The Kingdom of God is at least as much about the self-fulfillment of persons as it is about institutions.
- The well-being of every individual is important.
- It is not good to be alone.
- In our efforts to help others, we should accept their uniqueness and care for them in the context of their individual—not generalized—circumstances.

- Love and generosity are the first principles that should govern our relationships with others.

Jesus's pronouncements and his behavior repeatedly underscored these premises. They are central to his gospel and the beginning point of discussions in questions of morality. They challenge us to reach out to others generously, flexibly, and inclusively rather than seeking to justify exclusion. Why and how these Christian principles relate to the question of committed homosexual marriages should be obvious.

Biology, life experience, divine intent—identify the causes as you will—have made some members of the human family seek their deepest intimacy with another in ways that differ from the majority. The gender direction of love's longing is mysterious and not, finally, a matter of conscious volition. And for homosexual persons just as for the rest of us, this longing is more than superficially sexual. It also involves affection, sharing, caring, and personal vulnerability. Whatever its cause or causes, the main outlines of Jesus's teaching suggest that we should encourage these persons to find personal growth responsibly within the parameters of their God-given unique nature. We should not deny them sexual self-realization nor insist that they conform to some other one-size-fits-all pattern of longing. Jesus wasn't about inflexible rules. He believed in keeping priorities straight. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," he said (Mark 2:27). He would probably say something in the same vein about sexual expression.

Do we care enough about the well-being of our homosexual brothers and sisters to allow them a socially approved, supportive structure of love, acceptance, and security like that enjoyed by married heterosexuals, and the opportunity to grow together with a loved one in sustained, committed intimacy? Jesus did say that we should judge human behaviors by their fruits, that is, by their practical outcomes, not by some ideology (Matt. 7:16). Scripture teaches us by implication that it is not good for a man (or a woman) to be alone (Gen. 2:18). If two people of whatever gender commit to each other that they will love, cherish, and support each other without reservation through life's vicissitudes, will not such commitment likely bear good fruit—and should we not support that? I say yes!

Does it trouble me that my view of this matter directly challenges the present stance of the LDS Church, which opposes gay marriage and forbids as sinful any sexual activity outside of traditional marriage? Yes, it does sadden me to be at variance with the Church, but that does not ab-

solve me of the moral responsibility to analyze such matters as thoughtfully as I can and to share with others what my relevant experience has been. I do not see my questioning of the present Church position as inappropriate, disloyal, or without ample precedent. After all, in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in recent LDS Church history, there are numerous examples of significant doctrinal reinterpretations and course corrections. Major examples include the revised view that God is the God of all human beings, not of Israel alone; the reinterpretation of the gathering of Israel, the institution and subsequently the cessation of the practice of polygamy; and the extension of priesthood ordination to black men. It is even evident that the Church's view of homosexuality has undergone some significant adjustment in recent decades; therefore, it, too, may be susceptible to further revision.¹⁶

Is God inconstant, changing his mind suddenly as he goes along? Or do we change in our perception of his will as we experience evolutionary growth? I subscribe to the second position. Since the Church proclaims the importance of ongoing revelation and since our leaders, however wise, do not claim to be infallible, the Latter-day Saints above all religious groups should accept that internal, as well as external, dialogue can contribute to advancing our understanding of the divine will. Latter-day Saints should not merely concede that God's revelation regarding moral development is unfinished but should optimistically expect it to be continually refined. All of us have a responsibility to help prepare the seedbed of understanding for moral progress.

Gay marriage need not be seen as incompatible with LDS doctrine. The Church opposes sexual activity outside marriage; but by recognizing gay married relationships, it would allow the ennobling expression of natural sexuality in a morally responsible way, within the context of commitment. Gays could then be expected to observe the same standards of fidelity to their spouse that the Church requires of heterosexual persons. Channeling gay sexual expression in this way would discourage the promiscuity that gays as outsiders are, not surprisingly, vulnerable to. Surely that would be a good thing.

But what about the assertions in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," those that concern "the eternal role of gender" and declare an "ideal" familial structure for parent/child relationship?¹⁷ Neither need those beliefs be an impediment to supporting gay marriage. The Church need not accept gay marriages as "eternal"; it would not need to

offer *temple* gay marriages. They could be regarded like civil marriages—for this life only. As the Church views the matter, adjustments are going to have to be made in an afterlife anyway for many people, because many situations involving marriage, singleness, or parent/child/nurturer relationships are not ideally finalized. For those who do their best to live uprightly given their varying mortal circumstances, the afterlife will doubtless satisfactorily resolve itself.

In the meantime, let us be focused on how we can arrange the conditions of this messy present life so as to bring about the best chance of growth and happiness for all individuals. Moral concern for others, it seems to me, makes such efforts incumbent on us. Let's get serious about removing stones from the paths of our gay brothers and sisters. If God wants to change the orientation of their sexual feelings in an afterlife, that matter is in his hands, but we can make their lives better here and now. Let's acknowledge honestly what is really happening to gays and lesbians as matters now stand. Not a few enter heterosexual marriages because of social/religious pressure, even though they have grave doubts about such a decision and even though the outcomes for all concerned are frequently heartbreaking. Others suffer solitary lives unnecessarily or perhaps are driven by frustration into homosexual promiscuity. Still others find a gay or lesbian partner but are forced to do so without the stabilizing benefit of social and religious support, which imposes added strains on an intimate relationship. In the long run, many of these gay and lesbian persons leave the Church they have loved because they feel marginalized or deprived by its doctrines. Who can blame them? And it's a shame, because it doesn't have to be so.

I have observed some parents who, when their children come to make requests, look for reasons to say "no." A child wants to try something out of the ordinary, something intriguing, something perhaps with a little uncertainty to it. And these parents almost automatically respond by saying, "No! We don't do that. You might get hurt. No!" Instead of looking for ways to make the activity safe or for ways to accommodate it—in short, a way to say "yes"—they work hard at finding reasons for denial. In my experience, those children frequently grow up fearful and timid, or resentful and rebellious. Instead of expanding in confidence and capability, these youths either contract or explode. I have seen the same attitudes in some employers toward their employees and in some leaders toward their followers.

I believe we have an analogous situation in respect to the gay-marriage campaign. Gays and lesbians are looking for responsibility and opportunity; they are looking for fuller self-realization; they are looking for justice. And in response, up step those conservative guardians of the status quo who say “no” automatically, then cast about to justify their negativity. They conjure up bogeymen. They appeal to fear. Instead of opening up possibility, they are in the business of shutting it down. Instead of pursuing the path of inclusivity in the spirit of Christ’s gospel teaching, they employ a strategy of exclusion and rejection. That just does not seem right to me. It does not seem a response consistent with our highest Christian principles or worthy of our better natures.

None of us has all the answers. On interpreting some of these questions, reasonable people can disagree. But if we lack certainty in moving forward on this issue, we should err in the direction of fairness, compassion, and inclusion. Those are the ideals that matter most. Without compromising those ideals, we should and we can find a way to say to our gay brothers and lesbian sisters, “Yes!”

Notes

1. With ninety-eight endnotes, Muhlestein certainly has not erred on the side of under-documentation. But I learned long ago that no reliable direct correlation exists between the quantity of documentation and the quality of its application. Ultimately, an argument must stand solidly on its own legs.

2. The biblical passages cited by Muhlestein include no mention of the accepted practice of polygamy among Old Testament peoples, or for that matter, any mention of Mormonism’s polygamist doctrine and history.

3. For a useful discussion of the historical evolution of marriage as a social institution, see Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005). Through much of its history, marriage was primarily about family alliances, the consolidation and preservation of wealth and power, and/or the practical division of labor for family survival. If love entered into it, that was a bonus. Accordingly, sexual fidelity—particularly for males—was often ignored.

4. In July 2006 the American Academy of Pediatrics issued the following statement: “There is ample evidence to show that children raised by same-gender parents fare as well as those raised by heterosexual parents. More than twenty-five years of research have documented that there is no relationship between parents’ sexual orientation and any measure of a child’s emotional, psychosocial, and behavioral adjustment. These data have demon-

strated no risk to children as a result of growing up in a family with one or more gay parents. Conscientious and nurturing adults, whether they are men or women, heterosexual or homosexual, can be excellent parents. The rights, benefits, and protections of civil marriage can further strengthen these families." Quoted in Evan Wolfson, "The Freedom to Marry: Keep Dancing," July 12, 2006, http://www.advocate.com/print_article_ekticl33556.asp (accessed July 25, 2006). In the previous month, the Arkansas Supreme Court unanimously rejected arguments to deny marriage to gays. It received briefs from, among others, the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Psychiatric Association, the Association to Benefit Children, and the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers calling for an end to marriage discrimination in the interest of children and families. *Ibid.*

Muhlestein cites a study stating that children in single-parent households do not do as well as those from traditional two-parent households (note 17). This is true regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the parents. Two are better than one. And it constitutes yet another argument in favor of allowing gay marriages to give children of a gay parent the benefit of an additional nurturing adult in their home.

Doubtless, the biggest challenge to children reared in gay or lesbian households is the irrational prejudice against their families that they must sometimes contend with. Is the existence of that prejudice a sufficient rationalization for banning gay marriage? Shall we punish the victims rather than eradicate the cause of the injustice?

5. Chief Judge Judith Kaye wrote a powerful and persuasive dissent from the New York Supreme Court's 4-2 refusal to strike down the exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage: "The defendants primarily assert an interest in encouraging procreation within marriage. But while encouraging opposite-sex couples to marry before they have children is certainly a legitimate interest of the State, the exclusion of gay men and lesbians from marriage in no way furthers this interest. There are enough marriage licenses to go around for everyone. . . . [After all,] no one rationally decides to have children because gays and lesbians are excluded from marriage." Wolfson, "The Freedom to Marry."

6. Whose obligation is it, after all, to maintain the birthrate? Cannot heterosexual couples have more children if necessary for the common good? But given the steady expansion of our national population, is this *really* a problem?

7. The phrase "homosexual lifestyle" paints imprecisely with a very

broad brush. Just as with heterosexuals, there are numerous homosexual lifestyles. But if Muhlestein is alluding to “illicit” sexual behavior as central to this “lifestyle,” he should consider that legalizing gay marriage would discourage sexual promiscuity for those who choose to marry (just as it does for heterosexuals), would foster stability and sexual responsibility, and would make their sexual activity “licit.”

8. Muhlestein makes a stab at explaining—in ways that support his thesis—several unresolved questions in the gene research. These complex questions cannot be adequately treated in so short an article. I think that both he and I are out of our depth in attempting to analyze such technical matters and should yield to expert interpreters.

9. Simon Levay, “The Biology of Sexual Orientation.” AOL Hometown, 2003, updated February 2006, <http://members.aol.com/slevay/page22.html> (accessed July 2006).

10. For the results of a study of gender-atypical behavior distribution among homosexual and heterosexual persons, see Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).

11. The Kinsey H-H Scale placed total heterosexuality (0) at one pole and total homosexuality (6) at the other. Between the extreme points occur varying degrees of bisexuality. In the middle (at 3) Kinsey located evenly bisexual persons. Individuals assigned scale numbers of 1 and 2 would be dominantly heterosexual, with some degree of homosexual attraction; those assigned 4 and 5 would be relatively more homosexual but with some manifestations of heterosexual attraction. Kinsey based scale number assignments on extensive questioning of sample subjects concerning psychic indications (feelings, fantasies, dreams) and actual sexual experiences. See Alfred Kinsey, Wardell Pomeroy, and Clyde Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1948) for statistical distribution along the H-H scale of the numerically large sample in Kinsey’s study.

12. Those who claim that reparative therapies successfully eliminate dominant homosexual desires and enable satisfactory heterosexual functioning do not as a rule conduct careful follow-up studies to confirm that the apparent change of sexual orientation is permanent. I wonder why? Nor do they explore the degree to which a compelling need for religious/social conformity may cause such “changed” persons to persuade themselves against their true feelings. Not least, the proponents of such change therapies rarely differentiate carefully between strongly oriented homosexuals (5–6 on the H-H Kinsey Scale) and bisexuals (2, 3, 4 H-H measurement). The latter may well be able to

function heterosexually if so motivated, but to claim for these individuals a change of underlying orientation as a result of therapy is misleading.

13. Some suggest that homosexuals could be allowed to enter into formalized “civil unions” or “domestic partnerships” while the word “marriage” retains its established meaning and restrictions. Several years ago I thought that would be a practical compromise, but I have changed my mind. I now agree with the editors of the conservative *New Republic*, who in 2000—following a Vermont Supreme Court ruling in favor of supporters of gay unions (*Baker v. State*)—wrote this: “Post Vermont, we have entered a different world. But it contains pitfalls as well as opportunities. One danger is that supporters of equal marriage rights will accept a semantic compromise that would grant homosexuals every benefit and responsibility of civil marriage but deny them the word. The Vermont legislature is under pressure to construct an elaborate parallel institution, a kind of super-domestic partnership, that would be identical in all legal respects to marriage but not invoke the m-word. There is an old phrase for this kind of arrangement: separate but equal. To grant homosexuals all the substance of marriage while denying them the institution is, in some ways, a purer form of bigotry than denying them any rights at all. It is to devise a pseudo-institution to both erase inequality and at the same time perpetuate it. What if Virginia had struck down interracial-marriage bans [*Loving v. Virginia*, 1967] only to erect a new distinction between same-race marriages and mixed-race ‘domestic partnerships’?”

“There is in fact no argument for a domestic-partnership compromise except that the maintenance of stigma is an important social value—that if homosexuals are finally allowed on the marriage bus, they should still be required to sit in the back. This ‘solution’ smacks of the equally incoherent half-measure of ‘don’t ask, don’t tell,’ another unwieldy contraption that was designed to overcome discrimination but instead has ruthlessly reinforced it. Equality is equality. Marriage is marriage. There is no ultimate moral or political answer to this question but to grant both. And to keep marshaling the moral, religious, civic, and human reasons why it is an eminently important and noble thing to do.” Editors, “Separate but Equal?” *New Republic*, January 10, 2000, 9.

14. Some of what follows here is adapted from my essay, “Sexual Morality Revisited,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 37, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 114–36.

15. Thomas More’s *The Soul of Sex* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998) is an extended discussion of this rich potentiality.

16. Until recently, the Church has declared (1) that homosexual feel-

ings are self-chosen, the result of yielding to Satan's temptations, (2) that through prayer, righteous living, and the atonement of Christ such feelings can be made to go away (the Church unambiguously supported various reparation therapies); (3) that those with homosexual feelings should enter into heterosexual traditional marriage as a means of reparation; (4) that for one to declare openly his identity as homosexual (even without homosexual behavior) was grounds for compromised status in the Church and possible disciplinary action. Now, General Authorities are moving by degrees away from all of these earlier positions. Speaking for the Church, designated General Authorities acknowledge (1) that the causes of homosexuality are not known but are deep-seated and may be impossible to change; (2) that homosexual thoughts are not necessarily the result of unrighteous living, and that prayer, righteous living, and the atonement of Christ will not necessarily make such homoerotic attractions go away; (3) that heterosexual marriage should not be regarded as a cure for homosexual feelings; and (4) that if those with homosexual feelings do not engage in homosexual behaviors, they can participate fully in the Church and—in President Hinckley's words—"go forward like any other member." Gordon B. Hinckley, "What Are People Asking about Us?" *Ensign*, November 1998, 71; 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/0,19491,60561-202-4-202,00.html> (accessed February 2007); Dallin H. Oaks, "Same-Gender Attraction," *Ensign*, October 1995, 7–14. These gradual changes are significant, and they underscore the fact that further evolution of the Church's position, even further revelation, in these matters is entirely possible.

17. First Presidency and the Quorum 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; also <http://lds.org/portal/site/LDSOrg/menuitem>.

Recommended Readings

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- LeVay, Simon. "The Biology of Sexual Orientation." An overview of theories and research on the topic of sexual orientation, with evaluative commentary. Posted in 2003, updated February 2006. <http://members.aol.com/slevay/page22.html>.

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