

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Halfway Covenant?

As someone who has worked over the past several decades to try and bring greater understanding to the experiences of gays and lesbians in Mormon culture, I was pleased to read John Gustav-Wrathall's "Trial of Faith" (40, no. 2 [Summer 2007]: 78–107). A number of years ago at the annual Affirmation conference, I gave the keynote address, "Sacred or Secular: The Choice for Latter-day Homosexuals." In it, I argued that many of the homosexuals I knew desperately wanted a relationship with the Church, one that would allow them to worship, sing the songs of Zion, and be a part of a religious community with which they had deep spiritual connection and for which they had an earnest longing. I had also found that the majority who were no longer associated with the Church (because of official or self-excommunication—or who had just quietly lapsed) found it difficult to connect with another faith tradition and so had no active religious life.

What Gustav-Wrathall is demonstrating is that, within a very limited scope, homosexuals can worship in a Mormon community. Of course, as he honestly reveals, doing so under present conditions requires an amazing degree of faith and hope, to say nothing of charity. That is, to be openly gay (in a committed relationship or otherwise) in a Mormon congregation requires one to be committed enough to tolerate homophobia in its various manifestations, many of which are extreme. It

also requires one to live within such a faith community under a heavy burden of limited expression and opportunity. Nevertheless, given an understanding and supportive bishop, which Gustav-Wrathall has, he demonstrates that it is possible.

Several years ago I wrote to a General Authority friend that, given its present position on homosexuality, I thought the Church should consider doing something similar to what the seventeenth-century New England Puritans did for church members who could not claim conversion: institute a method of accommodation for homosexuals who were willing to enter into committed relationships (which are now officially and legally binding in some states and countries). What is now known as the Halfway Covenant was the inspired and practical solution of the Congregational churches to accommodate the second- and third-generation children of those who came to America to find religious freedom. Since one of the requirements of membership was that one had to have had a conversion experience and testify of such in the congregation, when the children of the first generation of believers could not rise to that level of piety, they were forbidden baptism and the sacrament. This created a crisis since it meant that, within a short time, membership would diminish and, worse, that children of the faithful would be separated from the communion of their parents.

The Halfway Covenant solved the problem by allowing such children

(and others in the same situation) to be baptized but forbade them from voting and from partaking of the sacrament until such time as they could have a sufficiently powerful religious experience to constitute conversion.

While such an accommodation would not satisfy many Latter-day Saint homosexuals, who understandably want nothing less than full acceptance, including all the rights and privileges available to heterosexual members, some “halfway” status could provide a means whereby those wishing to could be considered members “in good standing” and therefore enjoy many of the privileges of membership. Such an official accommodation would also greatly diminish the intolerance and prejudice many homosexuals and their families currently experience in the Church. Further, it would allow homosexual members with children to worship together.

A Mormon halfway covenant for homosexuals living in committed relationships might allow them to be baptized, partake of the sacrament, receive patriarchal blessings, and serve in many positions. It might exclude temple attendance and certain ecclesiastical callings. While not a perfect solution to the present situation, it might provide a way whereby homosexuals and heterosexuals could work together “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come to a unity of the faith . . .” (Eph. 4:12–13).

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Appreciation for Dialogue

I grew up in a very loving, traditional LDS family. I love the Church, and the Lord has been there for me. I started reading *Dialogue* when my intellectual mom introduced it to me several years ago. I didn’t subscribe right away; I would read it at her house and she would give me old copies. I found many articles that addressed issues that weren’t addressed as much or at all in our “normal” LDS culture. I would read about divorce or single parenthood. I would read about issues and conflicts related to abortion and women’s rights. I ended up leaving an abusive marriage and found some strength in the pages of *Dialogue* as I read about diversity in the lives of many LDS Saints who are also struggling and questioning. When my mother moved away, I, of course, subscribed. I appreciate the discount for students as I am trying to make it on my own, finish raising my last two boys and go to school almost full-time. I don’t agree with all the articles but I appreciate the intellectual stimulation and can relate to many of them. I like articles on women’s issues (including priesthood and women, women’s rights, and motherhood), art as I am an artist, traditions in faith, and history.

Thank you for being there.

Melanie H.
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A Rigorous Examination

The best thing in your summer 2007 issue is Michael Quinn’s letter to the editor (“Filling Gaps and Responding

to ‘Silences in Mormon History,’” 40, no. 2 [Summer 2007]: ix) informing us of his latest (110 pages, 248 footnotes) exposition on Joseph Smith’s “First Vision” of 1820, not 1824, as oft-argued by Rev. Wesley Walters and wrongly conceded by some LDS historians. (To read Quinn’s paper, go to www.dialoguejournal.com and click on “E-Paper #3” in the *Dialogue Paperless* section. It is downloadable free.)

It’s pleasant to see a rigorous examination of historical evidence exhaust-

ively investigating an important topic. Quinn’s evidence shows not only an extensive Methodist (exactly as Smith stated) Palmyra “camp meeting” religious revival in 1820, but also an interdenominational (Methodists and others) Palmyra camp meeting revival in 1818 as well. We may now safely ignore historical criticism that no such religious revivals occurred in Palmyra until 1824.

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