

## Notes

1. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), 213–14.

2. Neal A. Maxwell, *Wherefore, Ye Must Press Forward* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 12.

3. Michael Glatze, “How a ‘Gay Rights’ Leader Became Straight,” *WorldNetDaily*, July 3, 2007, [http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=56487](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=56487) (accessed December 1, 2007).

Roger Terry  
Orem, Utah

*A Reasoned Discussion*

Until this last issue of *Dialogue*, I feel justified in saying that the gay marriage “debate” has not been a debate at all. Those in favor of legalizing same-sex marriage have offered reasoned and impassioned *arguments* in support of same-sex marriage, while opponents of same-sex marriage have offered only the vehemently expressed *assertion* that gay marriage would undermine or even destroy traditional marriage. When pressed on exactly how same-sex marriage would do that, opponents have always simply repeated the assertion—without explaining the mechanics of how same-sex marriage destroys anything, much less the marital relationships of nongays.

When I saw that *Dialogue* was actually planning to publish an article making the case against same-sex marriage, I became hopeful. Knowing *Dialogue*’s reputation, I expected to finally get what I have been longing for all these years: actual reasoned discussion of substantive issues, with the possibility of actually understanding the concerns

of gay marriage opponents. And *Dialogue* delivered. For the first time ever, I read an actual argument against same-sex marriage that explains the assertions in terms that I can understand, even if I do not agree. Thank you!

I am grateful that Randolph G. Muhlestein (“The Case Against Same-Sex Marriage,” 40, no. 3 [Fall 2007]: 1–39) was willing to go out on a limb, especially knowing what type of criticism he might open himself up to from those who disagree with his position. Discussions of this emotional topic have often not been civil, so it takes courage to come forward and state the case. He did so both clearly and compassionately. Before reading his essay, I understood the scriptural arguments but could make neither heads nor tails of the social “death-of-marriage” argument. Thanks to his willingness to go out on a limb, I think I understand it much better now, and I thank him for it.

If I understand his core argument it boils down to the notion that legalizing same-sex marriage will cause people to become gay. Muhlestein did not overstate the case. Even while acknowledging that the data are difficult to analyze and that this thesis could be wrong, I read the emotional heart of his argument as caution: Gay marriage might not cause any more damage to the already beleaguered institution of heterosexual marriage, but don’t go tinkering with a system that is already in distress when you don’t know what effect the tinkering will have. To me this position suggests openness on his part to the possibility of same-sex mar-

riage if at some time in the future it can be proven that it causes no demonstrable harm.

If I understood him correctly, he sympathizes with the distress, pain, and social, economic, and legal difficulties faced by gay people in our society, and he would be willing to do anything to alleviate that difficulty as long as it doesn't undermine an institution as important as heterosexual marriage. This is not an unreasonable position.

As a gay man, I feel ethically bound to consider whether something good for me might cause harm to another. I hope my heterosexual brothers and sisters would feel similarly ethically bound to consider the harm that denying certain rights and privileges might have on me, and weigh whether the good served by denying those rights is greater than the harm inflicted on me and others like me.

For my part, I don't find his arguments persuasive, for a number of reasons very eloquently stated by H. Wayne Schow ("A Case for Same Sex Marriage: Reply to Randolph Muhlestein," 40, no. 3 [Fall 2007]: 40-67). Schow identifies the central problem that Muhlestein has chosen to ignore or discount—namely, modern scientific data about the biological basis for homosexuality and the witness of gay men and lesbians themselves.

As a published scholar of sexuality studies, I might add that I am familiar with the historical literature Muhlestein cited and feel that his rephrasing of scholarly findings was somewhat distorted. The vast majority of sexuality studies scholars would reject the extreme Foucaultian "social construc-

tionist" position that underpins his entire argument, just as they would reject an extreme "essentialist" position. Sexuality is interpreted and expressed in certain cultural embodiments, but there are certain basic biological givens that are not amenable to cultural manipulation. This is the position of most scholars working in this field.

A more reasonable interpretation of the data, more likely to be accepted by the majority of history of sexuality scholars, would be to point out that the number one cause of the erosion of traditional marriage in modern times is the modern, urban, industrial economy. Prior to roughly 1850, the basic unit of economic production throughout most of the world was the family. Increasingly after circa 1850, the basic unit of economic production became the corporation, which related to individual workers. Large traditional families have become increasingly problematic under the present economic and political regime.

Once you have an economy where family no longer matters—indeed, our economic system prefers singles because they are cheaper and easier to manipulate—individual choice and preference in relation to life mates moves to the fore. All of the "homosexualities" that have existed prior to the modern industrial age have not been *true* homosexualities, because they unfolded in societies and economies where the production of children (for the poor) and heirs (for the rich) were of utmost importance, and the free choice of partners was economically unfeasible.