

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sharing a Poem

You *Dialogue* folks have always seemed too smart for me—too rational—too, er, lofty!

When the fall 2007 issue arrived in early September, I began reading it tentatively. After more than twenty years, I had resubscribed, beginning with the summer issue, but which still remains unread. I feared I wouldn't understand much.

So the first article that caught my eye was Mack Patten's personal essay ("Depression and the Brethren of the Priesthood," 40, no. 3 [Fall 2007]: 194–200). It amazed and touched me with its honest, simple eloquence. I felt pressed to contact the author, to hear his voice, to feel his spirit. When I telephoned him, he hadn't yet received his own copy, so he was glad to learn it was in print.

I recited my poem "Night," written during a difficult period in April 1965, to meet him in the state we'd shared. He seems to represent a lot of older LDS men. We exchanged email messages. I hope to hear from him again. Here is my poem, inspired by Howard Salisbury:

Night

The North is silent
Uneasy lull awaits
As darkness gathers

Dry rot unseen
In lofty places
Un-shored structures
Hid by Blackness
Sand and Stone
Appear as one

Who beckons travelers?
Whose voice is clear?
Why are the sounds unsure?

Gusts disturb
This tortured sleep
Words in flooded streams
Still rage!
And Desperation
Strips my soul
Before Abyss—
Or Hope

April 1965

San Diego, California

*Eugene Kovalenko
Los Alamos, New Mexico*

Obliged to Believe about Noah

The Clayton White-Mark Thomas treatment of the story of Noah's flood was persuasively accomplished ("On Balancing Faith in Mormonism with Traditional Biblical Stories: The Noachian Flood Story," 40, no. 3 [Fall 2007]: 85–110.) I thoroughly enjoyed reading how these authors could present the facts in such a convincing fashion. Their ending in particular was noteworthy: "Without facts from science, religion struggles for direction in its stewardship. Without the values that are the essence of religion, science and economics may become prisons of meaningless and heartless facts. If it is to succeed, the covenant of life articulated in the Noah story must be honest to the fundamental message of the text, guided by the light of science and inspired by the music of religion" (103).

As good as their presentation was, I was nevertheless a little disturbed that

they failed to point out some particular points that tend, in my mind, to make their presentation at least out of date. For example, they start with a quotation from John Taylor, who described the Latter-day Saints as being "open to truth of every kind, no matter whence it comes, where it originates or who believes in it. . . . A man in search of truth has no particular system to sustain, no particular dogma to defend or theory to uphold" (85). This is clearly behind the times. President Boyd K. Packer, a leading candidate for becoming a future president of the Church, has on many occasions said that Mormons should say only things that are faith-promoting. He stated: "In the Church we are not neutral. We are one-sided. There is a war going on, and we are engaged in it." He proceeded by calling objective, impartial, and scholarly writing the evil that should be fought in this "war" ("The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect," *BYU Studies* 21, no. 3 [Summer 1981]: 267). He frequently states that scholars and intellectuals are a danger to the Church. Messers White and Thomas did not point this out. In my opinion they should have done so.

As another example, White and Thomas justify the holding of a variety of beliefs by Mormons concerning the historicity of the flood story: "As authors, we choose to follow the general rule apparent in the LDS Church which is to acknowledge respectfully the freedom of expression of, and tolerance for, those with differing conclusions regarding the flood. We consider this approach part of our joint Latter-day Saint quest to find the truth"

(99). That particular point of view is not possible for believing Latter-day Saints. The problem is that the story of Noah and the flood is told virtually the same as it appears in the Bible in LDS scriptures as well, including the Book of Mormon and the book of Moses. White and Thomas seem not to be impressed by that point. But Mormon readers of the scriptures must certainly be.

And finally, White and Thomas say, in essence, that slavery was abolished in the United States because of the strong religious values held by many abolitionists (101). Although true enough, this statement should not stand alone. It should be accompanied by mention of the fact that Brigham Young was not one of these abolitionists. In an interview with Horace Greeley on July 13, 1859, he told Greeley that slavery is of "divine institution."¹ Brigham, perhaps the greatest colonizer this nation ever produced, as governor of Utah Territory supported slavery of both blacks and Indians. Flake Green, the driver of Brigham's carriage when he entered the Salt Lake Valley, was a slave.

1. Andrew Love Neff, *History of Utah, 1847-1869*, edited by Leland H. Creer (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1940), 618.

Glen Wade
Santa Barbara, California

The Lesson of Noah's Flood

I thought that the article by Clayton White and Mark Thomas, "On Balancing Faith in Mormonism with Traditional Biblical Stories: The Noachian Flood Story," (40, no. 3 [Fall 2007])

85–110) was thorough and showed very clearly the importance of considering science in helping to shape our religious ideas about the Earth. A more pressing scientific/religious issue than whether a flood occurred thousands of years ago, however, is whether our actions today are threatening not only the lives of untold numbers of other species but also the lives of our children and grandchildren, through countless acts of destruction of our environment and the growing problem of global warming.

I've heard Latter-day Saints who admit that the environment is, in fact, in danger say things like, "Well, it's the last days. The scriptures say things will get bad at the end. It's just a fulfillment of prophecy. There's nothing I can do about it." The scriptures also say there will be lots of sin and wickedness in the last days. Does that mean we should be adding to the sin personally because it's prophesied to be rampant? That we should just give in and contribute wholly to the evil of the last days, because "it's in the scriptures"? If these are indeed the last days, don't we want to be doing the right thing and be prepared when Christ returns?

We are told that it is okay to work on the Sabbath only if we are pulling our ox "out of the mire," but that's assuming we didn't spend the entire previous day pushing the ox into the mire in the first place. In the same way, we can't keep indiscriminately destroying our planet, saying, "Well, God will take care of it all during the Millennium." We are flippantly pushing off our responsibility on God.

People who shrug off serious threats

to the environment repeatedly say it costs too much to make the changes conservation groups want. Are we actually willing to sin, though, as long as we can save money? Isn't that selling our souls in a very real sense? That makes saving the environment quite clearly a religious problem for me.

Too many people see this as a political issue rather than as the moral and pragmatic danger that it really is. Millions and millions of people will be affected by flooding, drought, famine, and disease caused by climate change. To shrug off their misery and suffering is a sin, when we are completely capable of relieving a great deal of it. We need to accept both the overwhelming scientific evidence of global warming and our religious obligation of stewardship of the planet. We need to use these gifts to help us stand up for the environment as devout Latter-day Saints, making this planet a place where all of God's creatures have a right to live.

Johnny Townsend
Seattle, Washington

Reply to Schow's Reply

I must say that I've never read a piece of more convoluted reasoning than H. Wayne Schow's advocacy for homosexual marriage ("The Case for Same-Sex Marriage: Reply to Randolph Muhlestein," 40, no. 3 [Fall 2007]: 40–68). Despite his contention that we should not take biblical statements about homosexuality at face value and that our Church leaders must be somehow unenlightened, homosexual *behavior* is a sin. Period.

From the beginning, God has declared that sexual relations of any kind between two men or two women constitute sin, just as adultery is sin. These sorts of commandments do not change just because social or cultural contexts shift over time. But what would be the result if the Church began sanctioning homosexual marriage? The answer is that homosexual behavior, between two married men or women, would no longer be considered a sin. And if homosexual acts within the bonds of such a “marriage” were not sinful, then practicing homosexuals would be eligible to enter the temple, and the Church would have no grounds for refusing to seal them to each other. But who are we to take it upon ourselves to play God, or to change his commandments at our own whim? This is the crux of the homosexual marriage issue, and the consequences are more far-reaching than Schow would have us believe.

The crucial question everybody seems to belabor is whether homosexual orientation is biologically based or strictly cultural. It may surprise most Latter-day Saints, but LDS doctrine insists that homosexuality is, at least in its incipient stage, biological. The scriptures teach that we are “fallen man” (D&C 20:20), that because of the Fall “all mankind” is “carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Mosiah 16:3). Our spirits were not perfect in our first estate, but they came to this earth pure and innocent (D&C 93:38). But our mortal bodies are of this fallen earth, carnal and sensual, until we tame the flesh so that it obeys the spirit.

Many people assume that if something is “natural”—even biological—we

must pursue it and embrace it. But our task in mortality is just the opposite. We are to put off the natural man and become saints through the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:19); we are to resist our natural tendencies and proclivities. Dr. M. Scott Peck put it nicely: “Just because a desire or behavior is natural does not mean it is essential or beneficial or unchangeable. . . . It is also natural . . . to never brush our teeth. Yet we teach ourselves to do the unnatural until the unnatural becomes itself second nature. Indeed, all self-discipline might be defined as teaching ourselves to do the unnatural.”¹

Now, I am not homosexual, so I do not completely comprehend the specific trial these individuals endure, but I was born with my own set of natural proclivities, many of which are ungodly and are tremendously difficult to overcome. But I don’t attempt to have these tendencies reclassified so that I can sin with impunity. Just because I might feel an attraction for my neighbor’s wife doesn’t mean I should ask the Church to make adultery an acceptable “alternative” lifestyle. I certainly don’t make the ridiculous claim that the Church is not pursuing the “path of inclusivity in the spirit of Christ’s gospel teaching” (Schow, 62) if it does not welcome adulterers into its ranks. The same argument, of course, could be made for pedophiles, serial rapists, pathological liars, greedy capitalists, drug addicts, or kleptomaniacs. So, why is it that homosexuals want to be special, to be treated differently from those who struggle with other but categorically similar thorns

in the flesh? Why is it that they (and this is one of Schow's primary arguments) believe they are entitled to happiness while living in sin? This, as Alma explained, is contrary to the nature of happiness (Alma 41:10–11).

I have compassion for individuals who struggle with homosexual tendencies. And I know that Schow is distraught over his son's death from AIDS. But his wish that gay marriage had been available in "Mormon country" so that his son wouldn't have gone off to California and contracted his fatal disease is simply wrong-headed. There is no guarantee that the availability of homosexual marriage would have prevented either the promiscuity or the infection. If, on the other hand, his son had recognized his sexual attraction for what it was—a natural inclination that needed to be resisted and perhaps even overcome—he certainly would not have died from AIDS.

What concerns me most is that homosexual tendencies are affected by cultural influences. The biological factor is not the only element in the equation. What this means, ultimately, is that, as homosexuality becomes more accepted and prevalent in society, more children who perhaps have a slight homosexual tendency will feel the cultural tug, will experience a curiosity, will explore these rather benign feelings, and will expand them beyond all reason. For, contrary to the propaganda, homosexuality is not binary, not simply an on or off switch. Rather, it is a spectrum of desire ranging from very intense to rather mild. Consequently, in such a society as we are "tolerating" into existence, individuals who fifty years ago

never would have given a second thought to a stray homosexual urge will now become entrapped by the propaganda and "discover" an identity that is largely a cultural construct. In this context, Elder Neal A. Maxwell was right: "When some things come out of the closet, they bring the darkness with them."²

Contrary to what the homosexual community wants us to believe, it is indeed possible to overcome homosexual tendencies. Most interesting is the conversion of a major activist in the homosexual revolution. Michael Glatze, founding editor of *Young Gay America*, recounts his story in "How a 'Gay Rights' Leader Became Straight." After sixteen years, Glatze began questioning his life and influence. When he turned to God for answers, "It became clear to me, as I . . . really prayed about it—that homosexuality prevents us from finding our true self within. . . . We believe, under the influence of homosexuality, that lust is not just acceptable, but a virtue. But there is no homosexual 'desire' that is apart from lust."³

Unfortunately, the homosexual community and its supporters, like Schow, simply refuse to acknowledge that this perspective has any validity. But Glatze's conclusions are both sobering and persuasive: "I know that homosexuality is lust and pornography wrapped into one. I'll never let anybody try to convince me otherwise, no matter how slick their tongues or how sad their story. I have seen it. I know the truth."

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 (accessed December 1, 2007).

Roger Terry
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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.

The two major models of socially sanctioned homosexuality in the pre-industrial world—pederasty and transgenderism—were models that indirectly supported the male/female pairing model by mimicking it without interfering with it. We don't see modern homosexuality in these societies because there were severe sanctions for expressing it. But the historical record does in fact provide glimpses of individuals who exhibited unmistakable signs of homosexual orientation. It's just that there were severe sanctions faced by an ancient Greek man, for instance, who exhibited too much of the wrong kind of affection for his boy lover once the man reached marriageable age.

Only in modern times have social libertarianism and constitutional, individual rights existed with sufficient strength to make it possible for gay people to finally come out. No one, including Muhlestein, wants to go back to the kinds of feudal society where gay people—or anyone not conforming to certain political or social ideals or economic norms—must live in silence or else fear for their lives. Only in modern times has science developed the tools to study complex phenomena like genetics, heritability, brain chemistry, hormones, and fetal development during gestation, thus enabling us to begin to understand the biological foundations of even more complex phenomena like human sexuality.

Modern homosexuality, in other words, was not invented by moderns. Moderns simply created the economic, social, and scientific conditions that have made it possible for us to recognize it, tolerate it, and even begin to un-

derstand it. This is not the only explanation of the sociological and historical data, but it has the advantage of taking account of *all* the data presently available to us, not just half of it. It takes changing social norms into account, as well as modern scientific data and—not least importantly—the testimony of gay men and lesbians themselves.

Parenthetically, it is hard to imagine what it would be like to live under the kind of economic system demanded by gospel principles, but I suspect that, whatever it is, it would enshrine freedom, responsibility, equality, compassion, and nurture of the planet, rather than inequality, poverty, exploitation, or coercion. The glimpses we catch of a gospel-based economy in the New Testament and in the early LDS Church suggest that, whatever it is, it will look very different from modern, family-eroding capitalism as well as ancient, coercive, woman-subjugating, homosexual-persecuting feudalism. Perhaps struggling for such a system is where the energies of those concerned about preserving the family should be focused.

John Gustav-Wrathall
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Appreciation for Wayne Booth

I appreciated Neal Kramer's review of Wayne Booth's *My Many Selves: The Quest for a Plausible Harmony*. (*Dialogue*, 40, no. 4 [Winter, 2007]: 137–41). Wayne Booth befriended me during my midlife Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago in the early 1990s. His ethical approach to literary

criticism has been useful in the work I am trying to do with interreligious contestational dialogue. I am writing to share another of Wayne's many selves with your readers.

In the winter of 1992 Wayne and I were at lunch discussing the social-psycho-spiritual dynamics of sincere "testimony contra testimony" dialogue within and between religious communities. Suddenly, he asked me what I believed about Joseph Smith's story. His pragmatic mind and open heart elicited this response: "Wayne, I would not be at all surprised if it turns out that Moroni, as an actual resurrected man, gave real gold plates to Joseph to translate by the power of God." Wayne

smiled thoughtfully, and said, "I like that. I could own that statement." We then talked of how he at times doubted his religious doubts and how he allowed himself to hope that something like Mormon sociality might exist beyond the grave.

Wayne Booth was a beloved teacher who loved Chaucer and William James with similar delight. Since these latter two are already enthroned along with Abraham—(I just know this, but dare not reveal my sources), I trust Wayne has already found heaven fulfilling his hopes.

*C. Randall Paul
Highland, Utah*