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READERS FORUM

APPROPRIATE INTELLECTUALISM

HERE IS A donation for SUNSTONE. Hope it helps. I'm not sure how much longer my wife is going to let me subscribe. She thinks that maybe after last general conference we should cut you guys off. She says that the Brethren had SUNSTONE in mind when Bishop Pace spoke of "inappropriate intellectualism" and Elder Oaks talked on "alternate voices."

Heck, maybe you guys should just have columns with those two titles then perhaps my wife would feel comfortable, figuring that the rest of the magazine was "appropriate intellectualism."

Keep up the good work.

SCOTT JONES
Salt Lake City

VICTOR

HE WAS AN elderly high priest. Victor and his sweet wife, Anna, moved quietly into our small California ward. As bishop I didn't attend Sunday School or the high priest group, so it took me awhile to hear about Victor.

He would say the most outrageous things during class time. Victor was a constant thorn-in-the-side of the gospel doctrine teacher, challenging many doctrinal points and offering divergent opinions. He was more accepted in the high priest group, where, gratefully, his questions and commentary often were relief from the repetitive manual lessons.

Victor never held any ward or stake leadership positions. He said he was always considered too radical and unorthodox. He filled an honorable mission to Mexico in his youth and graduated from BYU. But he was definitely unorthodox. Temple recommend interviews with Victor were always interesting; sometimes I wondered who was interviewing whom. To the question about sustaining the general and local authorities, he would answer, "Yes, as long as they behave themselves!" I really don't know how he got past the stake president, but year after year he did most of the ward's endowment quota at the temple.

I got to know Victor better after I was released and was able to attend the high priest group. The regular teacher was frequently out of town. He would ask Victor, who was always willing to oblige, to substitute. It was during those fascinating classes that I heard dissenting views on many topics, including the Adam-God theory, polygamy, historical interpretations of the Word of Wisdom, perfection, and the Masonic influence on the endowment. Decidedly upsetting grist for my conservative mill.

"Where does he get all that heretical stuff?" I mused more than once. Later I was to discover much of what he shared had been gleaned from SUNSTONE and *Dialogue* and extensive reading of Church history, both pro and con. B.H. Roberts was his favorite Church hero. He passionately believed Roberts's view of searching for the truth, regardless of where it led.

Victor would frequently bear his "testimony" in fast meeting. He contended that he didn't "know" the gospel was true because he thought such a thing was not possible. He did fervently believe in the restored gospel and Joseph Smith, warts and all.

He became the ward iconoclast. He made some members uncomfortable in some of their beliefs. He liked to help us take new looks at cherished Mormon myths. I never heard him referred to as a liberal or an intellectual. Somehow he just didn't seem to fit in the preconceived notion. What he was was a Christian.

When Anna died, Victor and their sons conducted the funeral. To this day, it remains the finest service I've ever attended, if such a judgement is possible. The bishop sat in the congregation. The family handled the whole service, from invocation to dedication. It was a pure celebration of love for Anna by her dear family. They shed no tears as they spoke of being with her again in the future. Strangely, none of the rest of us cried either.

One of my regrets in moving from the ward was that I would miss Victor. Two years later he died. Regretfully, I was unable to attend his funeral service, but I was glad Victor and Anna were together again. I still miss him. We could really use him in my ward in St. George.

DON CALAWAY
St. George, Utah

HOMOSEXUALITY AND EXCOMMUNICATION

RAYMOND TAKASHI SWENSON'S letter makes a good case for the validity of excommunication by comparing it to the military's process of removing members who do not meet its standards of membership. He accurately concludes that such processes give individuals the opportunity to decide whether or not they want to remain members and thereby to maintain personal integrity.

While this model does establish to some extent the integrity of excommunication as a process, what is troubling to many is that excommunication, and especially the attitudes of many Church members toward the excommunicated, precisely resembles the military model—devoid of that love that should be the ultimate governing principle in the true church and in a Zion society.

In the case of Sonia Johnson, much of the damage done to the Church's public relations concerns stemmed not from her support of and the Church's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, nor from her excommunication per se, but from the vitriolic and often nasty personal attacks made about Johnson by members of the Church.

Unfortunately, this same spirit pervaded Swenson's letter: the interesting analysis of excommunication which opens his letter quickly deteriorates into a far-reaching attack not only upon Johnson, but upon homosexuals.

One might ask how "living in Washington, D.C., at the time of her excommunication" and "speaking to a few participants in those events" qualifies or necessitates Swenson (or anyone) to draw the kinds of broad conclusions or sweeping judgments he makes about Johnson.

As for her "confessions of lesbian behavior," it shouldn't be necessary to point out that, although Johnson has declared her lesbianism, her actual behavior in reference to her stated sexuality is another matter and hopefully her business alone.

It might also be instructive to note that to most homosexual people a statement of one's homosexuality is not a "confession" but rather a statement about a fundamental part of our lives; no more a confession than saying that one is a lawyer.

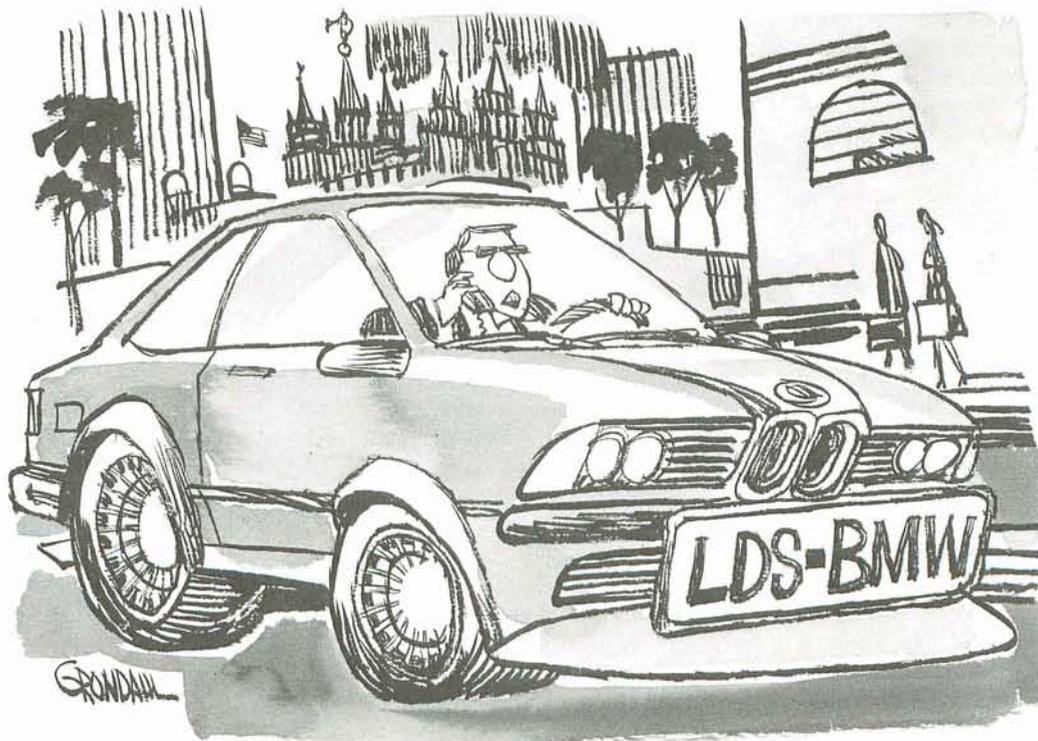
As a homosexual man, I was saddened that Swenson chose to link homosexuals and child molesters, and that he bemoans what he calls "the repeated refrain that homosexuals are genetically destined to behave as

homosexuals and therefore have no moral duty to curb such behavior." Statistically, child molestation is overwhelmingly a phenomenon of heterosexual men who molest young girls. The linkage to homosexuals is inaccurate and by now tiresome.

After a lifetime of research on the cause of homosexuality, I have never seen a single book, paper, or article that seriously advances such a theory as genetic destiny for homosexuality. Given the recently acquired and scant knowledge of genetics, developing such a proposal would be quite a feat.

I believe that my personal sexuality is best expressed in a committed, monogamous relationship, and that sexual expression, in order to be a positive, life-giving thing, must be an expression of love, friendship, and a host of other shared values. I know many homosexuals who share this same view, and who accordingly have committed, monogamous relationships. These homosexuals have certainly "curbed" their sexual behavior like most of their heterosexual counterparts.

That some homosexuals profess ideals that are not met by their behavior, and while others have no ideals at all, does not make their society "schizophrenic" any more than the existence of heterosexual people with committed, loving relationships next to



"Meet me at the Lion House for a priesthood-power lunch."

heterosexuals who engage in promiscuous sex, prostitution, child molestation, and rape make heterosexual society schizophrenic.

Perhaps as the focus of future letters, Swenson might discuss the schizophrenia of a church that conducts "courts of love" while its members vilify, degrade, and judge those who receive such courts.

DON HARRYMAN
Honolulu, Hawaii

GAYS AND THE GOSPEL

SUNSTONE HAS PUBLISHED two separate pieces over the past year which include anti-homosexual arguments that should not go unanswered. The most recent was a Readers Forum letter, "The Integrity of Excommunication," by Raymond Takashi Swenson (SUNSTONE 13:1). In his letter, Swenson starts out defending Sonia Johnson's excommunication, and then goes on to attack the "homosexual community . . . [and its] . . . schizophrenic doctrines." It is interesting that these two separate issues are included in the same letter, since homosexuality had nothing to do with Johnson's excommunication.

Swenson starts out his anti-gay argument by stating that he is "wary of the repeated refrain that homosexuals are genetically destined . . . and therefore have no moral duty to curb such behavior." He goes on to refer to the genetic theory, as well as any positive explanation for homosexuality, as a "rationalization." It should be noted that the scientists who have discovered possible "genetic" and/or "fetal hormonal" correlations to homosexuality are themselves heterosexual, as far as I am aware, and therefore would have no reason to "rationalize" a behavior with which they are not involved. Secondly, few gay/lesbian people are concerned with the issue of causality, since it is simply a natural and normal variation in a very diverse world.

Swenson then goes on to compare the "rationalizations" (of homosexuals) as identical to those of "child molesters, and confirmed adulterers." Apparently the common element is that all of these groups fail to curb "strong sexual impulses." The basic premise that sexuality is an evil to be subjugated except in the strict confines of marriage is too involved to be discussed here, but to draw an analogy between pedophiles, "adulterers," and gay persons is loose association at best.

To inflict harm or pain on another person is wrong in a spiritual, moral, and social sense. A "child molester" is using his/her power of

age and authority to coerce a child into a sexual act that the child may not be emotionally, and sometimes physically, ready to handle. The problem here is that the pedophile is selfishly risking the physical and emotional scarring of a child for a moment of sexual gratification. In the "confirmed adulterer" situation, you have a person who may have broken a sacred vow to his/her mate, which can result in serious emotional, and sometimes physical harm (sexually transmittable disease) to that person. This frequently results in the dissolution of the marriage. Both the spouse and the children become co-victims, and pain is suffered by everyone involved. The primary link between these two behaviors is that the pedophile and the adulterer selfishly risk serious harm to another human being for his/her own gratification.

Same gender couplings, like their heterogender counterparts, are between two consenting adults who are aware of the risks and rewards of that relationship. There is no victimization taking place. The benefits of intimacy in a loving committed relationship go far beyond the sexual, and are universal in nature. It should also be noted that anybody would have trouble "curbing" sexuality if their only option was a lifetime of celibacy. This most recent "solution" to the gay problem is destined to failure, just as the many other "solutions" imposed upon homosexuals over the centuries have failed. A life without knowing the joys of love, affection, sharing, caring, and physical warmth have not been heavenly imposed on anyone, and in fact would prevent us from experiencing many of the most rewarding aspects of earthly existence.

According to Swenson, homosexual "addiction" is like drug and alcohol addiction. There is not a shred of evidence anywhere for this new "pet theory" of the religious right, but it is heard frequently from Falwellian circles. Is the anglo man who is exclusively sexually attracted to hispanic women "addicted"? Could you say that the woman, whose sexual attraction is limited to tall men with facial hair is an "addict"? How about the young college man who is sexually attracted only to blond, buxom women? Is he suffering from an addiction? Certainly not. These are simple examples of sexual preference which we all have, and which help make us unique individuals. Sexual preference is a positive and normal part of human behavior. Gender is just one of the characteristics that define for each individual sexual appeal, along with such things as weight, height, eye color, complexion, hair color, skin color, body build,

legs, teeth, etc. It was Satan who wanted everyone to be alike. We all chose to be on God's side and fought for the right of diversity.

The other article, Hugh Nibley's "Last Call" (SUNSTONE 12:1), also took a hit at gays by inferring that Alma 30:18 was a "plain but discreet way of hinting at rampant homosexuality."

For centuries homosexuals have been bludgeoned with cultural misinterpretation of the Bible. For gay Mormons to allow the same to be done with the Book of Mormon is unthinkable. Nibley's personal interpretation requires a lengthy and detailed response that space does not allow. Let me just say briefly that male "whores" are not limited to a single sexual orientation. There are no latter-day scriptures that condemn loving, same gender relationships, and efforts to manufacture what does not exist are either dishonest or cultural affectation.

Far from denigrating society, gay persons have a commendable history in the world; one that eschews violence, hatred, intolerance, and promotes the aesthetic. The world is a "kinder and gentler" place because of the contributions gays/lesbians have made throughout the centuries: people such as Plato, Michelangelo, King James I, Gertrude Stein, Leonardo da Vinci, Tchaikovsky, Erasmus, Melville, and Walt Whitman.

Temporal organizations have the right to define behavior for its members. The Church, however, is not a man-made institution. Our Heavenly Father created his Church for all his children, not just the self-identified Saints among us. Some would like to treat the Church as an exclusive country club, but more properly, it is where *anyone* should be able to go and find the love of God. Christ is quoted as saying to the woman "go and sin no more," but he did not add that if she failed in that quest, she would be unwelcome as a member of his Church. What Christ did say was "neither do I condemn you" (John 8:11). In fact, if "sinless" perfection was required for LDS membership, the Mormon church simply would not exist. When our life-review is completed, I suspect that we will be judged more on how we treated others (even "the least" among you) than on whether we lived up to the societal standards of the day.

W. RANDY HAYNES
Media Relations Director
Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons