

LET US REASON TOGETHER

WHY MORMONISM CAN'T
ABIDE GAY MARRIAGE

By Christopher Bigelow

YES, CIVILIZATIONS NATURALLY evolve, as do human organizations on a smaller scale, including the LDS Church. Matt Thurston does a marvelous job of marshaling the arguments of Levi Peterson and Armand Mauss to show how this process occurs and how the LDS Church's evolution is directly affected by its host civilization's evolution.

All three writers, however, seem to share a basic assumption that human civilization inevitably progresses in a positive direction, which is sometimes not the case.

When Mormons adopted the practice of polygamy, we were the ones trying to evolve, not the host civilization, which continued to champion traditional heterosexual monogamy. In order to maintain that optimal tension of which Mauss speaks, we Mormons had to return to the marital status quo, at least in terms of earthly practice. And with the tolerance of our host civilization, we enjoyed much growth and progress during the twentieth century.

When our host civilization underwent the civil rights movement and evolved in the morally correct direction of full racial equality, the LDS Church was left dragging its feet in the old racist status quo, but we eventually came around because it was the right thing to do, in harmony with the gospel.

When our host civilization found itself considering making men's and women's social roles and functions interchangeable through the Equal Rights Amendment, the LDS Church sensed a threat and resisted in an unprecedentedly high-profile way. Now, some thirty years and millions of stressed-out women later, many women question whether they really can, should, or even want to have it all.¹ The LDS Church made its choice, and fortunately the host civilization opted not to change the fabric of society in such a funda-

mental way, or we would have found ourselves struggling to maintain our place within it.

Today, we find ourselves at another major evolutionary crossroads with gender-neutral marriage. As counter-gay activist Janice Graham writes, "Even though the Equal Rights Amendment was defeated in 1973, the feminist push for androgyny (to blend the sexes beyond recognition) was picked up by the gay movement and pressed on in the media, in the academy, in the legislatures, and in the courts."² Judging by the momentum behind the gay movement, I agree with Thurston that the passage of gay marriage into legality is inevitable, regardless of what happens in California this fall. A mere thirty years after coming out of the closet, the gay movement has gained the upper hand in public relations, cultural acceptance, and political clout.

Is there any chance that Mormons can maintain our optimal tension with society this time around? Or is our host civilization evolving in a direction we can't follow?

Following is some Mormon spiritual and theological reasoning concerning whether

same-sex marriage could find a place in the Mormon plan of salvation and thus become acceptable to Mormons.

Many Mormons understand the purpose of life as a test or schooling experience. Our spirits assume physical bodies and we learn through trial, error, and repentance to become more like God, which we can ultimately accomplish only through the Savior's atonement. The Mormon gospel is replete with standards and commandments designed to bring us closer to God and help us be more like him. Anything that detracts or detours us from this goal is the antithesis of the Mormon gospel.

According to Mormon belief, we are created in the image of God (Moses 6: 9), who we believe has a body with parts and passions, which many Mormons interpret to include genitals. From youth, we are told that the body is sacred and should be treated with reverence and respect, like a temple (1 Corinthians 6: 19). Mormon doctrine states that God himself is married and that eternal marriage is, in fact, the key to exaltation, which most Mormons understand to mean becoming eternally procreative parents like God (D&C 132:19). In fact, many Mormons believe that the heavenly parents engage in a celestial form of sexual congress.

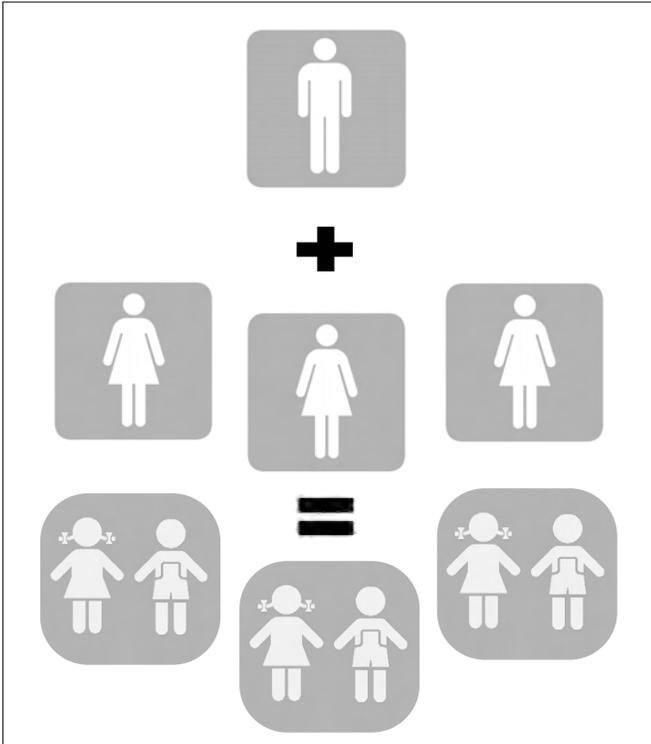
To Mormons, marriage is holy, meaning that it has divine qualities, and we venerate it as sacred. For Mormons, even earthly marriages not sealed in the temple have holy potential, as evidenced by our practice of performing posthumous sealings for any and all couples ever married on this earth. According to Mormon doctrine, then, same-sex "marriages" would, by our definition of marriage, have to be defined as holy—in other words, as potentially divine and even godlike.



**Is our host
civilization evolving
in a direction we
can't follow?**



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same-sex copulation (Leviticus 18:22–23), and sodomy offers no procreative benefits.

As I see it, the bottom line is that we Mormons would have to give up our theological integrity to accommodate gay marriage. If we thought that God could be gay, our eternally procreative, marriage-based doctrine would collapse like a house of cards.

In the nineteenth

century, Mormons espoused a principle that the civilization could not abide, and the civilization eventually pressured us to abandon earthly polygamy, although we continue to hold polygamy as an eternal principle. The twentieth century was the eye of the storm, during which we maintained Mauss's optimal tension. In the twenty-first century, our host civilization is espousing a principle that Mormonism cannot abide, and I expect that the civilization will pressure us to accept gay marriage with every bit as much force as they employed to make us abandon polygamy. But I think we're going to hold firm this time, simply because our doctrine won't allow us to do otherwise.

I don't know where future social tension on this issue will take us, but I believe that we're living in the latter days and that if anything fails, it will be worldly civilization, not the Lord's earthly kingdom. ☪



In order for same-sex marriage to be accepted by Mormons, we would need to become convinced that God himself could conceivably engage in such a union, including its sexual implications. To put it more bluntly, unless God himself could be gay and still be God, then there's no room for homosexuality in Mormon doctrine.

Some might argue that the Mormon imagination has conceived of God having polygamous sexual relationships making the Mormon imagination more elastic than most Christians' imaginations, so this next leap of imagination to gay marriage wouldn't seem out of the question. However, there's clear biblical precedent for polygamy (Genesis 31:17, 2 Samuel 5:13, 1 Kings 11:3), and polygamy serves a clear procreative purpose. In contrast, the Bible specifically condemns

NOTES

1. Elizabeth Perle McKenna, *When Work Doesn't Work Anymore: Women, Work, and Identity* (New York: Delacorte, 1998).
2. Janice Graham. "Arming Prince Charming," *Standard of Liberty Voice*, 4 August, 2006, <<http://www.standardofliberty.org/janice24.htm>>. (Accessed 8 September 2008).

