

## LETTERS

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### *"The Burden of Proof" Revisited*

I would like to comment on Gary Watts's review in the fall 1994 issue of the book, *Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation*, and the special 1993 issue of the *AMCAP Journal*, both of which address the issue of homosexuality in the LDS community. While Dr. Watts's review is not without merit, it is unfortunately so one-sided in its praise of *Peculiar People* and disparagement of the *AMCAP Journal* that it does little to overcome the "divisiveness" that Dr. Watts laments exists between the gay activist and reparative therapy camps. Even my lesbian friend, a psychologist who is active in the gay affirmative movement, had more positive to say about the journal than did Dr. Watts. Dr. Watts's review also seriously oversimplifies and misrepresents *AMCAP Journal* contributors' positions on several important issues.

While Dr. Watts is often not very clear or explicit about his beliefs and assumptions regarding homosexuality, as I read his review it appeared to me that some of his major assumptions could be summarized as follows: (1) people in the LDS community need to develop more understanding of and compassion for those who struggle with homosexuality; (2) homosexuality is probably caused by biological, hormonal, and psychosocial factors; (3) homosexuality is ingrained early in life (perhaps by the age of four) and is not chosen; (4) homosexuality is immutable or, in other words, cannot be overcome or changed; (5) those who advocate reparative therapy for homosexuality are intolerant, prejudiced, unscientific (i.e., unwilling to look at the empirical evidence), and unethical; and (6) the leaders of the

LDS church are wrong in their position that homosexual behavior is immoral and unacceptable in God's eyes.

I agree with Dr. Watts's "assumption number one." As a people, I believe that we in the LDS community need to develop more understanding of and compassion for those who struggle with homosexuality. A major reason we published the special issue of the *AMCAP Journal* on homosexuality was with the hope that the information it provided would promote understanding, empathy, and compassion for people who experience homosexual tendencies. Overwhelmingly, the feedback we have received from those who have read the journal, including people who struggle with homosexuality, their families, church leaders, and LDS and non-LDS counselors and psychotherapists, is that the journal succeeded in this regard. I was disappointed that Dr. Watts was unable to recognize or at least acknowledge this contribution.

I also tend to agree with Dr. Watts's "assumption number two." Current research evidence does seem to favor "interactional models" of homosexuality; that is, models which hypothesize that both biological and environmental factors contribute to the eventual manifestation of homosexual tendencies. Given the fact that we (as caricaturized by Dr. Watts) "canonized" William Byne, who believes the current research evidence favors an interactional model, I was surprised that Dr. Watts twice implied that the contributors to the *AMCAP Journal* hold to an exclusively "psychosocial" view of causation for homosexuality. This is clearly an oversimplification of my position and the position of other contributors to the journal. Perhaps Dr. Watts did

not like the fact that we pointed out that the current widely accepted gay activist dogma that homosexuality is simply biologically or genetically determined is not supported by the current scientific research. Gay activists do not wish to remain tentative about the possible causes of homosexuality for this does not serve their political agenda. Nevertheless, at the present time, at least, we should remain tentative for "we still know very little about the factors that influence sexual orientation" (William Byne, "Interview: The Biological Evidence for Homosexuality Reappraised," *AMCAP Journal* 19 [1993]: 17-27).

I can only partially agree with Dr. Watts's "assumption number three." First of all, to my knowledge there is currently no research which demonstrates how early in life homosexual attractions and preferences become "ingrained." Second, on the issue of choice, I do agree with Dr. Watts that most people probably do not choose to have homosexual attractions and preferences, although perhaps some people do make choices which unknowingly lead to the development of homosexual attractions and preferences. An important point several of us made in the journal, however, was that while people may not choose to have homosexual attractions, we believe they do have a choice about whether to behaviorally act on these attractions. Dr. Watts, for some reason, chose not to acknowledge that we made this important distinction.

I disagree with Dr. Watts's "assumptions numbers four and five." Though the idea that homosexuality is immutable is vigorously promoted by the gay activist community and is now widely believed by the lay public and professionals alike, it is simply

not true, as alleged by gay activists and Dr. Watts, that there is no empirical evidence demonstrating that change is possible. To the contrary, as I pointed out in my review article (29-45), during the 1940s through the mid-1970s over 100 therapy outcome studies were conducted which, collectively, provide some evidence that change is possible. While more research on contemporary reparative therapies is clearly needed, clinical case reports and client self-reports regarding the effects of contemporary reparative therapies also suggest that many people can diminish and even overcome homosexual tendencies.

In his review Dr. Watts implies that contributors to the *AMCAP Journal* are unwilling to look at the scientific evidence and that the "burden of proof" is on reparative therapists to prove that change is possible. I was left wondering why Dr. Watts was unwilling to hold himself to this standard. He ignored my discussion of the outcome research because, I must presume, to acknowledge it would have contradicted his allegation that we were unwilling to look at the research evidence. He then appealed to several "authorities" (none of whom provided any citations to empirical research to support their views) in an effort to bolster his position that change is not possible and that reparative therapies are not effective. He also failed to acknowledge that the gay affirmative therapy approach, which gay activists would have us believe is the only effective and ethical therapy choice for homosexual people, is devoid of empirical research supporting its efficacy. Why does Dr. Watts believe, therefore, that "the burden of proof" to demonstrate the efficacy of their approach should fall

more heavily on reparative therapists than on gay affirmative therapists?

Dr. Watts's veiled insinuations that reparative therapists are intolerant, prejudiced, and unethical come across as gay activist "mud slinging." Such name calling ignores the fact that there are many people with homosexual tendencies who have made their *own* value choice to reject the gay lifestyle and culture. These "non-gay" people do not wish to engage in homosexual behavior and they desire help in controlling, diminishing, and, if possible, overcoming their homosexual thoughts and feelings. Some gay activists seem so threatened by this that they are actually fighting to have reparative therapy "outlawed" as unethical in order to deny such "non-gay" people the option of trying to diminish and overcome their homosexual tendencies. Is it really intolerant, prejudiced, and unethical for reparative therapists to offer help to "non-gay" people who wish help in coping with, diminishing, and overcoming their homosexual tendencies? Dr. Watts seems to agree with the radical gay activists that it is. I personally believe, however, that the efforts of gay activists to restrict the treatment options of "non-gay" homosexual people is a clear example of a group of people who are intolerantly trying to force their values on all those who disagree with them.

I also disagree with Dr. Watts's "assumption number six." Even if it were eventually shown that sexual orientation is (1) genetically determined and (2) immutable, it does not logically follow that LDS church leaders are, therefore, in error when they say homosexual behavior is immoral and unacceptable in God's eyes. As I pointed out in my article, "one's belief

about whether or not homosexuality is desirable, normal, or moral is a value choice and cannot be resolved by scientific findings regarding etiology, prevalence, or treatment outcome" (35). I recognize that struggling to control one's homosexual tendencies, perhaps throughout one's life, must be a great burden. Nevertheless, according to LDS prophets and apostles, this is what the Lord expects (Ronald D. Bingham and Richard W. Potts, "Homosexuality: An LDS Perspective," *AMCAP Journal* 19 [1993]: 1-15). While some people must bear the challenge and pain of physical or mental disabilities, chronic illness, lifelong singlehood, divorce, or death of loved ones, it may be that others must cope with unwanted homosexual tendencies throughout their lives (if efforts to diminish and overcome these tendencies are unsuccessful). This is difficult doctrine, but as I understand it, it *is* currently LDS doctrine. Dr. Watts, it appears, would like the LDS church leaders to change this doctrine on behalf of people who struggle with homosexuality, but obviously it is not his prerogative to dictate church doctrine to LDS leaders.

In closing, the overall thrust of Dr. Watts's review of the *AMCAP Journal* seems to be to convince readers that the journal is not worth reading because the evidence in this domain is already all in, and the gay activist position is clearly the only tenable viewpoint about homosexuality. I hope that my response to Dr. Watts's review has raised the possibility in readers' minds that perhaps this is not really the case. I invite readers of *Dialogue* to read the *AMCAP Journal* (and other reparative therapy literature) and to decide for themselves whether or not they agree with Dr. Watts regarding

these controversial and important issues.

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### *A Reply*

My review of the special 1993 issue of the *AMCAP Journal* on homosexuality seems to have struck a sensitive chord with its editor, P. Scott Richards. His rather strident response surprised me. He characterizes my review as "one-sided, oversimplified, and misrepresentative" of the journal's contributors' positions on several important issues, and this despite the fact that I felt I tried to provide a fair review. Differences of opinions are often exaggerated through misunderstanding and miscommunication, and generally speaking we are all much closer than we would care to admit. I'm gratified that we both agree that people in the LDS community need to develop more understanding of and compassion for those who struggle with homosexuality.

As for the specifics of Dr. Richards's criticisms of my review, I would like to comment and ask interested readers to judge how our respective perspectives meet our common concern that more understanding and compassion is needed in the LDS community for our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. My impression is that most of the contributors to the *AMCAP Journal* as well as the leaders of LDS church Social Services acknowledge that the etiology of homosexuality is complex but believe that people with same-sex attractions are flawed, damaged, or retarded in their psychosexual development, are sin-

ning when they act on their desires, and are in need of "repair" and that "repair" is possible in most cases. If that impression is erroneous and/or an "oversimplification," I apologize.

Dr. Richards indicates that a "major reason we published the special issue . . . on homosexuality was with the hope that the information it provided would promote understanding, empathy, and compassion for people who experience homosexual tendencies." I personally fail to see how a journal promoting the premise that homosexuals are inherently flawed, sinful, and in need of repair promotes understanding, empathy, and compassion for homosexuals. I'm sorry the above stated reason was not more self-evident and suggest that Dr. Richards is being a bit disingenuous. It seemed to me, and was so stated by Dr. Richards, that the main purpose was to publish an alternate viewpoint about homosexuality that he acknowledges was "imbalanced" but justifiable because it was impossible to get published in the professional literature. Why? Because, according to Dr. Richards, only the "gay affirmative" perspective gets published. Is he not really seeking understanding, empathy, and compassion for reparative therapists rather than homosexuals?

Dr. Richards has a proclivity to label me and anyone else critical of reparative therapy as a "gay activist" in support of "gay activist dogma" or the "gay activist agenda" rather than sincere and scientific. Are we to infer from his response that the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the American Medical Association, the World Health Organization, the Society of Pediatrics, and other professional organizations who have all questioned

the premise and the efficacy of reparative therapy are "gay activist" organizations? Labels can be both informative and misleading. If I am "gay friendly," am I a "gay activist" and does that carry a negative connotation? I willingly and publicly admit that one of my personal goals in life is to try to make the way smoother for all the disadvantaged, including homosexuals, who have in my opinion been misunderstood and are victims of some of the most blatant discrimination imaginable.

Dr. Richards asserts that there is empirical evidence demonstrating that change is possible and cites over 100 therapy outcome studies done during the 1940s through the mid-1970s which, "collectively, provide *some* evidence that change is possible" (italics added). He chides me and other "gay activists" for failing to acknowledge this information. The results of these studies are viewed with some skepticism because of the entirely self-report nature of the outcome measures, and I submit that if these papers have scientific validity the above mentioned professional associations and societies would embrace them and not continue to assert that "there is no published scientific evidence to support the efficacy of reparative therapy as a treatment to change one's sexual orientation."

Dr. Richards accuses me of "gay activist mud slinging" because of "veiled insinuations that reparative therapists are intolerant, prejudiced, and unethical." These "veiled insinuations" that he attributes to me were not actually "veiled" and did not originate with me but are direct quotes from his parent professional group, the American Psychological Association, as well as one from the American

Psychiatric Association. Perhaps a little introspection is in order here. Why are the reparatists at loggerheads with their own professional organizations?

Dr. Richards asks, "Is it really intolerant, prejudiced, and unethical for reparative therapists to offer help to 'non-gay' people [Richards and Joseph Nicolosi's terminology for homosexuals reportedly uncomfortable with their same-sex orientation] who wish help in coping with, diminishing, and overcoming homosexual tendencies?" Ethicists object to reparative therapy because it advertises a cure for a condition that has not been judged to be an illness and reinforces a prejudicial and unjustified denigration of homosexuality. Richards implies that only "radical gay activists" oppose such efforts and cites their opposition as a "clear example of a group of people who are intolerantly trying to force their values on all those who disagree with them." Am I missing something here? Exactly who is trying to force whose values on whom? Why can't we just love these people with same-sex attractions and acknowledge that their feelings are just as valid as those of us who are straight? There seems to be an implied assertion that "gay" and "gay activist" opinions are of no value. Aren't they the ones who are dealing with homosexuality firsthand?

His position is that many people with homosexual tendencies have made their own "value choice" to reject the gay lifestyle and culture and that therapists are justified in helping them to try to diminish the feelings and adapt to the more conventional heterosexual lifestyle or to celibacy. Perhaps such therapy would not be so offensive to me and others if it were termed "adaptive therapy." That ter-

minology avoids the implication that these men and women are in need of repair but recognizes that because of societal disrespect for homosexuality one alternative for some homosexuals that may ultimately provide the greatest happiness is to try to adapt to the heterosexual lifestyle. This terminology would also acknowledge that same-sex attractions are valid and universal across all races and cultures as well as most mammalian species (its observation in animals is a strong argument against psychosocial causation) and would offer "adaptive therapy" as one way of avoiding societal opprobrium.

State psychological associations are beginning to address the ethics of reparative therapy which would even include my concept of "adaptive therapy" as bordering on the unethical. The Washington State Psychological Association adopted an advisory policy on sexual conversion therapy in 1991, which reads in part:

Psychologists do not provide or sanction cures for that which has been judged not to be an illness. Individuals seeking to change their sexual orientation do so as the result of internalized stigmas and homophobia, given the consistent scientific demonstration that there is nothing about homosexuality per se that undermines psychological adjustment. It is therefore our objective as psychologists to educate and change the intolerant social context, not the individual who is victimized by it. Conversion treatments, by their very existence, exacerbate the homophobia which psychology seeks to combat.

By Dr. Richards's criteria, this is another "gay activist organization" promoting a "gay agenda."

Dr. Richards is correct when he points out that one's belief is a value choice. Some sincerely think that their value choice is inherently better than someone else's and that God has sanctioned their choice, i.e., there are universal values and they are all mine. I would only hope that somehow, someday, and someway the LDS church will figure out a way to find a place for those with same-sex feelings that doesn't require a loveless life of celibacy or a mandate either to change the feelings or be disenfranchised. As Dr. Richards pointed out, it is not my prerogative to dictate church policy, however, I can and do pray and look forward to the time when this policy, which I personally consider to be unchristian, will change. I'm sorry that Dr. Richards and I see this issue so differently. I sincerely hope we can take a different point of view and still be friends, and that through dialogue we will both increase our understanding.

Gary M. Watts  
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### *Egyptian Grammar and the Book of Mormon*

In the winter 1994 issue Stephen Thompson notes three items in my essay to which he takes exception in his review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe. The first two focus on rather tongue-in-cheek hypotheticals I provided to illustrate to readers unfamiliar with Hebrew the fact that the English text of the Book of Mormon is not a literal translation from an underlying original Hebrew text.

First, subjective absolute nominatives such as "I, Nephi, *having been*

born of goodly parents, therefore . . . " (1 Ne. 1:1, emphasis added) are not characteristic of ancient Hebrew. If they were as "acceptable" in Hebrew as Brian Stubbs asserts, thus supporting a claim that the Book of Mormon is a literal translation from a Hebrew original, we might expect them to appear in other Hebrew texts—a particularly appropriate location might be the church's short-lived *Selections from the Book of Mormon in Hebrew*, translated into Hebrew from English. Of course, even there no such constructions appear.

Second, if the English text of the Book of Mormon were a literal translation from ancient Hebrew into English, then we might expect to encounter several instances in the Old Testament in which the subject of a clause is separated from its verb by several intervening clauses and phrases. To illustrate how such a passage might appear in a known translation from Hebrew with which most readers would be familiar (*viz.*, the King James Version [KJV] of the Old Testament) hypothetically reflecting an original Hebrew text, I created a version of Genesis 1:1 according to the syntax of Words of Mormon 15-18. Of course, such unusual syntax is not characteristic of Hebrew and is not reflected in the KJV. It *does* characterize other products of Joseph Smith, such as the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price.

Commenting on a pre-publication draft of my essay, David P. Wright correctly summarized my point: "Hebrew does not use . . . participial phrases as found in the Book of Mormon, but rather *shorter complete clauses*," with the result that if "the Book of Mormon is a translation of Hebrew, it then cannot be a literal

translation, *since it is construing finite verbs as participles in subordinate or dependent clauses*" (emphasis added). Elsewhere, he cautioned that "critics will get [Ashment] on using the Book of Mormon translation since it is not the ancient dialect; he should [state] in his disclaimer that 'retroverting' the relevant Book of Mormon passages to archaic or biblical Hebrew doesn't change his arguments much. [It would have been ideal for him to provide his own retroverted archaic Hebrew version; but then critics would pick at this.] The same caveat applies to his use of the modern Hebrew translation" (last brackets in original).

It is as though Thompson read Wright's comments, for those are the very items he criticizes, interpreting my hypotheticals as serious arguments. I agree with Thompson that my citations from the *Selections from the Book of Mormon in Hebrew* do "not prove anything about the nature of the language of the Hebrew Bible"; and that my hypothetical rendition of Genesis 1:1 according to the syntax of Words of Mormon 15-18 "also proves nothing about the Hebrew Bible"—that it is my own creation. For I was not attempting to prove anything about the Bible; I was focusing on the unusual syntax of the Book of Mormon.

Just as Hebrew is characterized by "shorter complete clauses," so is Egyptian. The third item to which Thompson takes exception is a statement by Alan H. Gardiner that I quoted to that effect in the first printing of *New Approaches*: "No less salient a characteristic of the language is its concision; the phrases and sentences are brief and to the point. Involved constructions and lengthy periods are rare, though such are found in some

legal documents" (*Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed., 4).

In a letter dated 17 September 1993, I explained to Thompson that my point was that in Egyptian, as in Hebrew, the verb and subject of a clause are closely connected, as opposed to "sentences" in the Book of Mormon such as Words of Mormon 16b-18 and others cited in my footnote 43. In this example, the subject is separated from its verb by an adverbial phrase modified by a relative clause; five embedded sentence-length clauses; an adverbial phrase; a resumptive subject; and an absolute clause with an appositional subject. I told him that as I see it, the examples from the Book of Mormon to which Brian Stubbs appeals as evidence of an underlying Hebrew original text (as well as Words of Mormon 15-18) do not reflect the customary Hebrew verb-subject or subject-verb syntax; and they do not reflect the earlier Egyptian verb-subject-object or later subject-verb-object syntax, which is all I had in mind when I quoted Gardiner. I proposed to Thompson that our difference of opinion regarding Gardiner's statement might have been due to the fact that I had interpreted it from the syntactic (word-order or *intra-clausal*) level of the clause or sentence (because that was what I was discussing in my essay), while he seemed to make his criticism from the hypotactic (*inter-clausal*) level. Indeed Junge, in the passage Thompson cites, regards Gardiner's statement from a hypotactic perspective when he rejects it, concluding that "it is . . . up to us to find . . . the rules by which Egyptian hypotaxis was governed." I totally agree with Junge and Collier regarding the complexity of hypotaxis in ancient Egyptian; and with

them and Thompson, that Gardiner's statement is inappropriate at that level. I concluded my letter to Thompson with the assurance that, because of the potential for misunderstanding, I would omit the quotation from Gardiner in the next edition of *New Approaches*.

That was 17 September 1993. Thompson never responded to my letter. Shortly thereafter I learned that since *New Approaches* had sold so well, a reprint was planned and I could make corrections to my essay. I took advantage of that window of opportunity and rewrote the first part of footnote 42, a shortened version of which appeared in the January 1994 second printing: "Nor is it [the unusual syntax of the Book of Mormon] representative of Egyptian, in which the syntax is verb-subject-object (later subject-verb-object), and the verb is not separated from its subject by numerous phrases and clauses." Consequently, Thompson's third criticism has been out of date for about a year now.

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