



4-1-1995

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Recommended Citation

Laws, Duane M. (1995) "Imposing Our Values," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*: Vol. 21 : No. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol21/iss1/8>

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Imposing Our Values

Duane M. Laws, EdD¹

How exciting to read an exchange of viewpoints by thoughtful AMCAP members in the Journal (Vol. 20, no. 1—1994). The issue of “we and them” who don’t do things because “we/they” wait for others to “do it,” is very true. I am one of “them.” I am an LDS professional who has chosen the nonconfrontive role described by Nelson in his article (“Professional Organizations: Whither Thou Goest Will I Go?”). I often hide behind the “academic objectivity” shield of the classroom where you are supposed to consider all views correctly without any bias. I hear in academic circles that it is incorrect in class to make moral judgements or to “impose your values” upon students.

This “objectivity” shield was often penetrated as I taught in a non-LDS environment. I tried not to “impose” my LDS values. What has my years of teaching LDS and mainly non-LDS students taught me? I found it is IMPOSSIBLE TO IMPOSE VALUES ON ANYONE! Also I found it impossible to keep my values from being expressed, especially in teaching about marriage and the family. Non-LDS students would ask sometime during the semester if I were Christian. When I responded affirmatively they would remark, it was good to have Christian professors in the university. This would usually spark a discussion of the overt way in which strongly held views of professors were shared by supposedly “objective teachers.”

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As I considered Nelson's purpose in writing his article (e.g., to motivate AMCAP members to respond and read the exchange with Fischer and Gleave), a variety of thoughts came to mind. I thought why doesn't everyone write and give their opinion, express their values and thoughts? Scott, the AMCAP journal editor, would love to be overwhelmed with letters to the editor! But then I realized that a lot of AMCAP journal readers and members may be like me. We read if we have time, we react to a few friends and/or our spouse and that is the end of it.

Does it matter where we stand on the issues? Does it matter whether we state our value commitment in print? It does make you vulnerable when you share or write your opinion. However, the absence of a response also communicates a message which often is not the one you intend. So in case everyone out there in AMCAP land is waiting as I have until you retire to share written responses, let me encourage us all TO TRY TO IMPOSE YOUR VALUES by letting journal readers know where you stand.

What are my reactions to the excellent exchange of Nelson, Fischer and Gleave? First, I had a question. Who is Dennis Nelson? The journal listed the credentials of the other writers in the dialogue, but not Nelson's. Is he so well known that just "stupid me" is uninformed?

I thought to myself as this question arose in my mind, what difference does it make what his profession is? Aren't you responding to his ideas and not his professional background? I then recognized that I do have some judgements about the value positions people take in relation to their personal or professional background. I assume, therefore, that all three of these brethren are psychologists talking about their APA experience in relation to the issues raised by Nelson.

I have responded in silent protest ways similar to those of Nelson's. I stopped membership in two professional organizations and a subscription to a popular magazine because I disagreed with the positions they espoused. In one situation I did move beyond silent protest by writing to the magazine editor. My response from the editor was, "We are sorry to lose you as a subscriber, but unfortunately your views are not represented by a majority of our readers." I wondered why I took the time to write, but it felt good to state my protest.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s I changed university teaching positions from Utah to Michigan. This was in the midst of student and faculty protests over Viet Nam. I was not in favor of the demonstrations at our university, but I watched what took place rather than get involved with faculty teach-ins. I did not think that sharing my views on academic activism with my colleagues would serve any useful purpose. Besides they might think negatively about the Church too, I silently protested by not getting involved in the teach-ins. I'm not sure whether I was being tolerant as suggested by Lane Fisher or whether I was fearful of speaking out lest student demonstrations might occur in my classes. The values I held were definitely different than those of the demonstrators.

More recently in the 1990s at my university the issues of gay/lesbian liberation have begun to surface. Demands for student funds and offices for gay/lesbians student activities were made and honored. Demands for "rights" and benefits for "domestic partners" were thrown into the public arena. Many businesses and local governments have accepted these demands. I suspect they do so because they believe the majority want this and they might be sued for intolerance. I stepped out of my silent role and offered to faculty-student coordinators some articles and tapes by Dr. Lorraine Day and Dr. Joseph Nicolosi who have opinions about AIDS, testing for AIDS, and homosexuality. I was informed that these persons were radical and/or religiously biased. They were not sensitive enough to the real issues concerning homosexuality and the AIDS crisis. No public showings of videos or publications with alternative views were provided to students ... except in my classes!

In my family sciences classes (safety of the class again), I showed and discussed a variety of materials in order to balance what was given in the university presentations. I presented and discussed the views of gay liberation activism represented by such groups as the "Act Up" organization in our area. But I never confronted the views of outspoken "lesbian" faculty members in public and university-sponsored presentations. I attended a number of the lectures by speakers (such as Duberman) who were brought in for AIDS awareness weeks. These weeks are major events planned and funded by university resources.

The programs are advertised as the honest, open, and objective viewpoints on homosexuality. They are needed, according to the student sponsors, to overcome the "homophobia" prevalent in society.

I never stood up in public questions/answers sessions to present alternative viewpoints because of the fear of being labeled as a religious fanatic or homophobe. I did ask the bookstore representative at the lectures if they had other books or pamphlets on gay/lesbian issues and counseling besides those displayed. They did not recognize any of the titles or sources I inquired about, such as Nicolosi's reparative therapy or Conrad's book, *You Don't Have to be Gay*. The books on display were about the victimization of gay/lesbians and the homophobia of conservatives or "right wing religious groups." The process and support for "coming out" was clearly documented to help interested students.

I quickly learned that to publicize that homosexuality is a social problem or to suggest that a person might want to overcome same sex attraction was an evident indication of my "value bias" and my attempts to "impose my values" upon students. I needed to be much more tolerant and objective as a teacher should be. After all, I was informed, all major psychological associations have changed their former positions on homosexuality as an emotional problem. I was wrong and the associations of professionals were right.

I recall referring a student to the university counseling service to get help in changing his sexual attitudes and behavior. He was in conflict with his feelings and values. He wanted to change his behavior. He told me that the counselor would not be able to help him change his basic nature, but would be available to help him accept his homosexuality and learn to live with it. At that time I did not know of a reparative therapy counselor to whom I could refer him. Since then I have become aware of Evergreen International and other organizations that help individuals with conflicts over same sex attraction. Counseling centers and services for gays and lesbians who want to change sexual orientation are not advertised in our area. Many gay/lesbian services and offices are available and advertised both on and off campus.

I did write some letters to our student newspaper on the issue of homosexuality. I suggested that maybe there needed to be some support and resources in the university for individuals in conflict who

desired to change same sex attraction or a “gay” orientation. Student letters in response stated that maybe faculty members (specifically Professor Laws) needed to have their consciousness raised to the realities of sexual development. Studies were quoted about homosexuality as a biological reality and not a choice made by unfortunate victims in a prejudiced society. APA diagnostic manuals were also quoted to help enlighten me as to what the psychological professional community was now saying about homosexuality.

These few skirmishes with the “free and open” discussion of issues in the academic community or public arena convinced me that I had enough other priorities in rearing a large family, being a Church leader and teaching my classes; I did not need to enter the fray. I stood on the sideline and read what others were saying. I cheered as a spectator when those who stated my viewpoint were allowed to be heard. I chose to work silently with groups like Evergreen to help individuals overcome same sex attraction and ignore the rhetoric in society.

In retrospect, as I evaluate my responses, I realize I allowed my fear of criticism, ridicule or rejection to moderate or even stop my speaking out more openly on these issues. I thought to myself in justification: I need to be tolerant, not impose my values and avoid appearing as a moralistic radical. Others, like William Bennett and Pat Buchanan, were expressing the moral indignation I felt. They were taking the heat. That was sufficient. I was safe on the sidelines in my class involved in my silent protesting.

As a person, and a marriage and family counselor, I believe it is impossible to remain neutral or “objective” (whatever that means for a counselor). I am consistently listening to clients with issues of wrong and right. How shall I best help a parent or marriage partner deal with values issues? I used to think that the response of “Uh huh, tell me more” was an “objective” way of staying out of the emotional and spiritual dilemmas of families, but I don’t any more. There are right and wrong responses and right and wrong choices. I believe in absolutes, not “it depends on the situation...” I find that when appropriate, a clear statement of my values and position is essential in counseling both LDS and non-LDS families. They can accept what they want and what is useful to them.

I have become more verbal in describing issues from a conservative viewpoint and am pleased to hear morals, ethics, and standards discussed more openly in public discourse. I am convinced that those who hold amoral or relativistic views have dominated the dialogue in counseling literature. These views may even have been helped by many of us who because of fear of professional ridicule or censure have been silent. Other positions need to be heard. I feel more confident in sharing my ideas and supporting what I consider to be moral/theistic viewpoints in education and counseling. I find increasing positive acceptance for spiritual values from those I teach and counsel.

In conclusion, I believe that AMCAP has a legitimate additional and unique role to play as a professional organization. AMCAP should be the voice and place to articulate as clearly as possible by capable AMCAP writers/speakers the Restoration perspective on current issues. I think AMCAP conferences and publications should provide concepts and strategies whereby counselors can identify and support Restoration philosophy/viewpoints. These efforts should seek answers for these questions: What are Restoration concepts and strategies that are relevant for counseling? When and how do these concepts add strength and health to personal and family growth? What are Restoration issues of morality in our changing culture? We have the advantage in having inspired prophets, leaders, and the scriptures to serve as resources for our quest.

I believe AMCAP needs to consider all sides in discussions of contemporary cultural issues. AMCAP publications and conferences should consider alternative views, but AMCAP ought to be the place where one can go to hear/read about how LDS counselors interpret the scriptures and words of the Prophets as they counsel individuals and families. People today need all the help available to confront and identify the “evil and designing” influences that are destructive to marriage and the family. AMCAP ought to give us the intellectual tools to develop emotional and spiritual behavior to assist in counseling, education and our own personal lives. To discover, then to defend and sustain a Restoration perspective on issues of relevance to LDS counselors and educators is a worthy goal for AMCAP. If we don’t do it, who will?