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What's the Harm? Does Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage Really Harm Individuals, Families or Society?

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Readers familiar with LDS teachings may not find many new ideas in this section, but two full chapters dedicated to what General Authorities have taught on the topic may be an especially useful reference for Church leaders. Other chapters included in this section focus on the necessity of trials, faith, and the Atonement and how to show love and support to those who feel same-sex attraction.

Section 3, "Scientific, Clinical, and Social Perspectives," offers a wide array of information for those who experience same-gender attraction and those who want to help them. Topics include how to choose a therapist, types of therapy used to treat same-gender attraction, how people can disclose their secret struggle to others, what parents and therapists can do to help children and adolescents who feel gender confusion, treating sexual addictions, and defending traditional marriage. The chapters that explain what science proves and what it cannot prove are particularly relevant for all Latter-day Saints, considering the public support gay rights activists have garnered in claiming that same-gender attraction is inherent and unchangeable.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution of *Understanding Same-Sex Attraction* lies in its combination of scientific evidence in section 3 and personal testimonials in section 4. Here essayists recount how they emerged from homosexual lifestyles to find satisfaction in rejoining the Church mainstream, some even finding success in heterosexual marriages (although the authors of the book are quick to warn against marriage as a "cure" for homosexuality).

The book concludes with appendices giving contact information for resources like LDS Family Services; Evergreen International, a nonprofit group dedicated to helping those who want to reduce their same-sex attractions; and Foundation for Attraction Research, the nonprofit publisher of this book.

As some professional and state organizations frown on therapists who believe in reorientation therapy—seeking to ban their practice, in some cases—this book fills a void. It offers hope, and it voices a conversation that has largely been silenced in the larger media due to political pressures. Latter-day Saints who read this book will find a well-rounded and compassionate view of the complex and oft-misunderstood challenge of same-sex attraction.

—Kimberly Webb Reid

What's the Harm? Does Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage Really Harm Individuals, Families or Society? edited by Lynn D. Wardle (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008)

Written by nineteen interdisciplinary authors and edited by BYU professor of family law Lynn D. Wardle, *What's the Harm?* responds to several questions concerning same-sex marriage: does legalizing same-sex marriage harm traditional families? Does it discourage responsible sexual behavior and procreation? How does it affect the meaning of marriage? Does it impair basic freedoms to citizens and institutions?

In this potpourri of scholarly and legal papers, attorneys, educators, family counselors, and even linguists document through scientific studies and court cases the consequences already inflicted on men, women, and innocent children through practices such as abortion and no-fault divorce. Because such practices contribute to the breakdown of families and have longitudinal and intergenerational effects, they provide the social, moral, familial, relational, political, and conceptual architecture of the community. The harms are seldom seen immediately by the general public. Likewise, the preponderance of evidence from more than a dozen authors is unified in agreeing that history, natural law, common law, and common sense uphold

traditional marriage. These authors passionately support marriage between a male and female as the foundation of family and community morality.

University of Minnesota law professor Dale Carpenter, in one of four chapters defending same-sex marriage, likens gay families to “a rising river, stretching across the country,” and conservative opposition as a dam that blocks the way. “Impeded in its natural course, the river does not dry up. Its flow is simply redirected into a hundred rivulets and low pastures all around the countryside.” Whether readers agree with Carpenter’s views on same-sex marriage, he is right that such oppositional forces are not likely to retreat: “Many conservatives may think that the collateral damage that is being done by the opposition to gay marriage is worth it in the end” (324).

If there is going to be any resolution in this divisive debate, it will most likely take place in a flood of credible information. Such is the goal of Wardle’s 393-page paperback anthology published by University Press of America. *What’s the Harm?* is a critical and timely book for those of various religious faiths and political persuasions who desire to open a dialogue with those of differing views as well as to defend marriage in an educated way.

Perhaps the most unsettling analysis of potential damages to family, constitution, and society is in chapter 17, “Or for Poorer? How Same-Sex Marriage Threatens Religious Liberty,” by Roger T. Servino. He describes the chilling effect that same-sex marriage would have on religious liberty and religious institutions should the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) be changed or repealed. Such a transformation would impact “adoption, education, employee benefits, health care, employment, discrimination, government contracts and subsidies, taxation, tort law, and trusts and estates.” In turn, the new legal

regimes would “directly govern the ongoing daily operations of religious organizations of all stripes, including parishes, schools, temples, hospitals, orphanages, retreat centers, soup kitchens, and universities” (326).

Servino and other authors argue that “current law provides no room for non-uniform definitions of marriage within a state, it is all or nothing. But even across state lines it is difficult to countenance variable definitions . . . because of difficult questions like child custody. The high stakes reinforce the uncompromising posture of the contending sides.” Legalizing same-sex marriage will further induce governments to strip benefits from religious institutions that refuse to treat a legally married same-sex couple as morally equivalent to a married man and woman (326).

Although supporting same-sex marriage in Canada, Martha Bailey’s essay “Dwelling among Us” calls for “a more nuanced and careful response to this divisive issue. We do not all hold the same values, but we can agree on much, particularly on the importance of healthy human flourishing, tolerance and mutual respect.” Genuine pluralism can flourish when differences are “debated rather than ignored.” A unity can unfold in human affairs when we engage in what John Courtney Murray calls “the unity of orderly conversation” (160). *What’s the Harm?* most certainly moves us in the direction of a more nuanced and careful response as well as orderly conversation while helping to flood us with balanced information.

—Alf Pratte

It Starts with a Song: Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of Songwriting at BYU, produced by Ron Simpson (Provo, Utah: Tantara Records, 2009)

In the 1995 film *Mr. Holland’s Opus*, a musician and composer tries to write