Whither Thou Goest, Will I Go? But I Say Unto You, That Ye Resist Not Evil

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Nelson (1994) posited that a cultural war is at hand and bemoaned the politicization of professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association. He proposed that politicization is a perversion of professional organizations. Initially it was unclear whether he was more alarmed that professional organizations show political leanings or that the politicization has been “decidedly leftward in ideological geography.” It was clear, however, that he viewed those leftward leanings as immoral. I was impressed and concerned by several of the author’s statements. I was also stimulated to ponder my own resolution to the dilemma the author proposed.

I am convinced that Nelson (1994) was more alarmed by the leftward leanings than simple politicization. While he called the politicization a perversion, he also challenged individual members, and AMCAP as an organization, to come out and fight. In essence he asked AMCAP to join in the perversion, but to do so from, I assume, a right-wing position.

He set up a straw-man Mormon and accused him of being (1) unprepared for confrontation, (2) subservient to authority, (3) equivocal, (4) naively passive, (5) inattentive, and, (6) afraid to lose his relative comfort and predictable income. I find that caricature to be inaccurate. While examples of such people could probably be found, it is a straw-man with little substance supporting it.
I was concerned by Nelson's (1994) *ad hominem* name calling which was neither professional nor helpful. Phrases such as "terminal judicial activist groupieism," and "radical reformists and aberrants masquerading as civil rights advocates in collusion with social scientists" are intemperate and inflammatory. Clearly, he saw the situation as a polarized war between left and right, right and wrong, good and evil, moral and immoral. He showed no compunction against insulting "the other side." He sounded the battle cry to awaken and inflame the troops by calling them wimps and threatening that they could participate in the war or be victims.

Personally, I haven't joined in a fight because someone called me a wimp since I was twelve years old and the threat that I can be a victim or a participant is a false dilemma. Nelson (1994) presented only two bad alternatives; victim or participant. Whenever only two alternatives have been presented, all the possibilities have usually not been explored. Alternatives are numerous and do not have to be opposites.

I was pleased with the opportunity to reflect on my own experience with this dilemma. I found both experiential and scriptural support for a third alternative. I apologize for using my own experience, as it may sound self-righteous, but this is something I learned the hard way and I think that it is valid.

I completed my undergraduate and masters degree at BYU. I completed my doctoral training at the University of Minnesota and practiced professionally in the Twin Cities. I lived in Minnesota for eleven years. There certainly was a notable contrast in political climate between Provo and Minneapolis. I went to the University of Minnesota with considerable zeal. I challenged politics. My fellow graduate students and I met to discuss and debate philosophy and politics. What I discovered in those encounters was that overt conflict was antagonistic and only seemed to reify polar positions and entrench people in camps. We became more rigid than workable and our understanding did not grow. Relationships that might have been fertile and nourishing became rocky and anemic.
Later in professional practice, I worked with colleagues who were decidedly liberal and even quite radical. Support for abortion, homosexuality, extramarital sexual experience, and even the terrorism of the IRA was commonplace. I found that if I stopped the debate and listened to my colleagues, I did not agree with them, but I did love them.

I learned to do what I would do if I loved someone. It became much more valuable to rototill my colleague’s garden than to wrangle about politics. It was far more rewarding to be concerned about the health of my friend’s child than to worry about her sexual preference. I learned more about the suffering and healing of children from my Irish friend by watching her work than by castigating her terrorist connections. In the end, I probably had more influence on them as well. They certainly asked more questions after they knew of my love. They often experienced dissonance between what they experienced in our relationship and what they assumed about the LDS Church.

It is instructive to review the experience of Ammon, Aaron, and Muloki as they attempted to teach a people who were decidedly their political adversaries (Alma 17-22). These men were directed to

Go forth among the Lamanites, thy brethren, and establish my word; yet ye shall be patient in long-suffering and afflictions, that ye may show forth good examples unto them in me, and I will make an instrument of thee in my hands unto the salvation of many souls. (Alma 17:11)

It was a daunting task “for they had undertaken to preach the word of God to a wild and a hardened and a ferocious people; a people who delighted in murdering the Nephites, and robbing and plundering them.” (Alma 17:14) Ammon went to this people who were enemies of his people and offered himself as a servant (Alma 17:23–25). Only after King Lamoni had seen Ammon’s goodness, loyalty, and courage was he able to listen to the message. Only then did Ammon begin “to speak with boldness” (Alma 18:24).

Contrast Ammon’s strategy with that of Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah who went and “contended with many about the word” (Alma 21:11). They boldly decried against the Lamanites and were
rejected, tortured, and cast into prison (Alma 20:29–30). While they were patient in all their sufferings, they were not effective in having anyone listen to them.

Ammon’s strategy worked not only with Lamoni, but also with Lamoni’s father, the king of all the Lamanites, to whom they appealed for Aaron’s release. When Lamoni’s father saw the great love that Ammon had for his son he ordered Aaron’s release from prison. When Aaron met Lamoni’s father, he immediately employed Ammon’s strategy. He said, “We will be thy servants.”

The king refused to allow them to be servants and responded, “I will insist that ye shall administer unto me, for I have been somewhat troubled in my mind because of the generosity and the greatness of the words of thy brother Ammon” (Alma 22:2–3). Lamoni and his father listened because they knew of Ammon’s love.

Bold declarations that are not founded in love are not influential.

I recall the words of the Savior which I think bear on Nelson’s (1994) false dilemma.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if a man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? (Matthew 5:38–47)

It seems to me that Jesus offered a third alternative and invited us to transcend the war. He invited us to live a life of peace.
It was also instructive to me to review the revelations that Joseph Smith received and what he wrote when he was faced with a more modern cultural war on two fronts. In 1832, the Church was centered in two major locations; Jackson County, Missouri, and Kirtland, Ohio. One front of the cultural war was outside the Church between the Mormons and some of the old settlers in Missouri and Ohio. Anti-mormon rhetoric, slander, and violence was prevalent in the entire region. On March 24, 1832 Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were attacked. Sidney was dragged by his heels with his head hitting the ground until he was unconscious and left for dead. Joseph was stripped, tarred, beaten, and scratched by a mob led by a local preacher.

The other front was within the Church between the saints in Missouri and Ohio. Early converts to the Church from New York were largely settled in Jackson County which had been identified as Zion. Edward Partridge was appointed as the Bishop in Zion. Later converts who were associated with Sidney Rigdon were largely settled around Kirtland where Joseph personally resided.

There arose personal and political antipathy between these two centers with considerable suspicions, backbiting and inflammatory prose both written and spoken. In April of 1832, Joseph went from Kirtland to Missouri to set matters aright. While in conference there, he facilitated a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Edward and Sidney.

After amicable relationships were restored, Joseph received the revelation which includes counsel regarding both fronts of the burgeoning cultural war. Regarding the inside front, the Lord commended the saints for their repentance. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, my servants, that inasmuch as you have forgiven one another your trespasses, even so I, the Lord, forgive you" (Doctrine and Covenants 82:1).

Regarding the outside front, the Lord counseled the people to seek peace. He said, "And now, verily I say unto you, and this is wisdom, make unto yourselves friends with the mammon of unrighteousness, and they will not destroy you. Leave judgment alone with me, for it is mine and I will repay. Peace be with you;
my blessings continue with you” (Doctrine and Covenants 82:22–23).

Joseph returned to Kirtland and within a few months much of the intrachurch antipathy reappeared in Missouri. On December 27, 1832 he received further revelation. He wrote to W. W. Phelps in Missouri in January of 1833. He sent a copy of the revelation which he characterized as “the ‘Olive Leaf’ which we have plucked from the tree of Paradise, the Lord’s message of peace to us” (Roberts, 1930, p. 315).

I believe that the Olive Leaf brings peace because it forever dispels the false dilemma of dichotomized right and wrong, moral and immoral, heaven and hell. A careful reading of this treasure shows that people can be justified in living various levels of law which are accompanied by various responses from the universe. Note that there is a fulness for each qualitatively different lifestyle.

For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory. And he who is not able to abide the law of a terrestrial kingdom cannot abide a terrestrial glory. And he who cannot abide the law of a telestial kingdom cannot abide a telestial glory. . . . Ye who are quickened by a portion of the celestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness. And they who are quickened by a portion of the terrestrial glory shall receive of the same, even a fulness. And also they who are quickened by a portion of the telestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness. . . . All kingdoms have a law given; And there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom; and there is no kingdom in which there is no space, either a greater or a lesser kingdom. And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds also and conditions (Doctrine and Covenants 88: 21–24, 29–31, 36–38).

While right and wrong may be polarized, they are not dichotomous. Both within and without the Church, we are all finding our way to the law which we can abide. And while we can invite others by example and gentle persuasion to abide the more adequate law, we need to understand that not everyone will accept our invitation. Refusal to hear or accept the invitation does not make someone an enemy.

As an example, let me refer to a current professional dilemma and illustrate how I think AMCAP transcended a cultural war.
Fassinger (1991) reviewed the history of the treatment of homosexuality in *The Counseling Psychologist*. She noted three approaches to the treatment of homosexuality. It has been seen as mental illness and treated with reparative therapy. Homosexuality has been seen as innocuous and treated with a null approach. It has also been seen as an expression of personhood which has been oppressed by a hostile environment and needed to be treated with affirmative therapy. She opined that reparative and null approaches were unethical. She argued against null treatment because it tacitly allows societal abuses of homosexual people to continue. She posited that the only ethical treatment of homosexuality was affirmative therapy.

This can pose one part of an ethical dilemma for LDS professionals. How can LDS therapists ethically treat homosexuality with affirmative therapy if their views do not agree with Fassinger’s ethics? They cannot lie to themselves, their clients, and their profession.

Bingham and Potts (1993) reviewed the writings of the prophets to establish that the Church views homosexual behavior as sin and antithetical to true personhood. They noted the invitation and ability to change such behavior through the power of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ with support from church leaders and counselors.

This poses the other half of the dilemma for LDS therapists. Many clients with issues around homosexuality neither believe in the Church, the prophets, nor the scriptures, and do not desire to change their behavior. LDS therapists cannot impose their values on their clients.

A professional/cultural war could ensue here. Two polarized camps could emerge. That would be unfortunate since both points of view have validity. Fassinger (1991) is correct in her report that society has been hostile toward homosexual people and that violence has hurt our homosexual brothers and sisters. There is no denying this reality. Bingham and Potts (1993) are also accurate in their report that the prophets have warned about the dangers of the misuse of sexuality. There is no denying this reality either.
I was pleased to see Richards’ (1993) response to this dilemma which I believe transcended a possible war. Richards (1993) reviewed the appropriate use of reparative therapy for homosexuality and concluded his article by noting the ethical demand for all professionals to exercise tolerance of clients and one another. The transcendent term is *tolerance*. Both perspectives have validity and a place in the therapeutic community. Should either position attack the other they would be violating the higher order demand for tolerance.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1982) characterized tolerance as “the most lovable quality any human being can possess. . . It is the vision that enables one to see things from another’s viewpoint. It is the generosity that concedes to others the right to their own opinions and peculiarities. It is the bigness that enables us to let people be happy in their own way instead of our way” (Kimball, 1982).

Elder John Carmack has written an excellent and pragmatic guide to tolerance that I highly recommend to all mental health professionals. Carmack (1993) characterized tolerance as an *active* principle, by virtue of which we are to energetically seek to understand and build relationships within our communities. Carmack (1993) allowed for strong beliefs and noted that

our beliefs do not require or permit Latter-day Saints to be intolerant of others whose beliefs differ from our own. Can we not hold fast to everything we believe, yet have sympathy and understanding for those whose beliefs differ from ours? (p. 9)

Richards (1993) invited all professionals to maintain tolerance and transcend conflict. And if other professionals can’t do so, Jesus invited us, as Latter-day Saints, to do it unilaterally.

Nelson (1994) showed courage to stand up and be counted. To him, this response may sound like an uncertain trumpet-call to battle. To me, it sounds like a more versatile trumpet that harmonizes the many notes between heaven and hell. I believe that the peace of the Olive Leaf comes from disavowing dichotomized right and wrong and transcending conflict.
I believe that we show more courage by extending active tolerance even when it is not reciprocated. I believe people are more influenced by our peaceable walk with the children of men than by our engaging in a cultural war.

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References


