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Response:
To Love the Lord is to Hate Evil
Proverbs 8:13

Dennis E. Nelson, PhD

A MCAP Journal Editor, Dr. Scott Richards, has requested some written comments in response to Dr. Fischer’s critique of my essay which appears in this issue. Before doing so, however, I want to give my personal thanks to Dr. Richards, Dr. Fischer, and earlier reviewers of the manuscript for the time and effort they expended, and for encouraging and participating in an open debate about ideas such as these.

Clarifying a point that Dr. Fischer sees as “initially unclear” is I believe the first order of business. It is strongly implied in Fischer’s critique that I am more concerned with the nature of a professional organization’s political stance (i.e., leftward) than in the fact that one is being taken. Such an assertion has a tinge of validity, but falls far short of the truth.

My view of professional organizations and scientific societies is a rather traditional one. Objectives of disseminating research findings and other intellectual products to members of the profession and the public is of high priority. Refreshing and stimulating the membership through meetings and workshops is also part of the groups mandate.

While such a view allows for vigorous internal debates regarding all sorts of things, it does not allow for the use of organizational resources and image to promote particular views on current political and social controversies, or to employ supposedly scientific data and authority to change national values or cultural policy.
There are of course rather narrow guild issues that are within the purview of the traditional professional society. While these are rather self-serving and perhaps make the group less than "pure," they may at least be rationalized on the basis of enhancing and uplifting the field of study represented.

When a scientific society either abandons such objectives and activities in the pursuit of others, or when the traditional forms and functions are in reality subjugated to another agenda, the legitimacy of that organization is in question. The furthering of political and social agendas is a legitimate activity and individuals are free to form groups dedicated to doing so. However, that is not the purpose of professional associations which represent an entire field of study or vocation.

I have no objection to the formation of a group called "Psychologists in Favor of Abortion," or one entitled "Psychologists Who Believe in God" for that matter. However, using the resources, influence, and structure of a national scientific society to fuel an attempt to remake the values, political policies, and cultural mores of a nation is starkly unethical. That is true irrespective of the direction such an effort takes.

It is true that the particular direction taken by many professional groups during the past two decades adds insult to injury by furthering causes and positions that directly conflict with those I try to live by and pass on to my children. This fact must, however, be seen as much as possible as a separate issue. Hopefully, this explanation will make it clear that I make a two-fold indictment against the changing nature of most learned societies in the behavioral sciences and helping professions. In a number of cases they have both left their traditional moorings and have set sail under a thinly veiled pirate’s flag, denying both their course and its purpose.

Dr. Fischer chooses not to deal substantively with any of the hypotheses I raise regarding the paucity of response by LDS professionals. Instead, focus is placed on what is referred to as "name calling" which is labeled as "neither professional nor helpful"
and upon characterizing some phrases in my essay as “intemperate and inflammatory.”

It is granting little to agree that there are rarely if ever pure types to be found, but simply asserting that hypotheses have “little substance” begs the question. Leaving aside anecdotal data, I believe considerable evidence could be marshalled from several of the social sciences as well as reviews of LDS historical material which would provide substance to several, if not all, of the original hypotheses.

Given time and space limitations, let me broach only two examples. Let an analysis be carried out on statements by LDS General Authorities from the Church’s inception until, let us say, the beginning of the Heber J. Grant presidency. It is likely that considerable support would be found in such statements for independent thinking on the part of the membership. Would the same degree of support be found in a parallel study of statements from the same source since that time? My prediction would be in the negative.

In a meta-analysis of sociological studies on LDS populations and institutions might it be discovered that the same stages and problems that plague institutions in the world at large also afflict LDS organizations and programs? Would students of intellectual thought transmission find that the same waves of thought and behavior prevalent among the general population seep into Mormondom only at a slower rate, or with some patternistic time lag? The point is that if the LDS people can be legitimately framed as an ethnic group or subculture at all, there is likely some support for the hypotheses I raised.

With respect to the “intemperate and inflammatory” phrases Dr. Fischer finds so objectionable, phrases are sometimes selected to convey a vivid cognitive picture in the mind of the reader. At the worst, they offer a sharp-edged portrait of the writer’s personal view. At best, they serve as a telling and accurate description of those characterized. There is no objection to having others who seek to praise the same individuals do so in terms of glowing hyperbole. However, to simply place new names on my descriptions
because of disagreement over their accuracy is no better behavior than the intellectual sin of which Dr. Fischer accuses me.

At the core of Fischer's critique however, lies an assertion that I have framed a false dilemma, and posited a war that need not exist. Unfortunately, the support for this notion rests on several assumptions about my position which are either untrue or seriously misconstrued.

No assertions were made in my essay that it is useful or even defensible to attack vigorously everyone who disagrees with us. Most of us have had similar experiences to those of Dr. Fischer, whether in a graduate study setting or otherwise. That is, we have encountered a number of people with whom we have formed a friendship, or from whom we have learned important lessons, who disagreed with us on some quite fundamental issues. That truth does not address the situation framed by my essay.

It is also unfortunate that Dr. Fischer tends to focus on the outcome of convincing, or converting those who are on the opposite side of a conflict. The fact that Aaron, Muloki, and Ammah converted few and were imprisoned tells us nothing whatsoever about the correctness or incorrectness of their approach to the situation. Were we to use such outcome based judgments, Noah and Christ would surely rank low on the "Wise Judgment" scale. There are times and places where conversion and teaching are neither a possible or even an appropriate goal.

At this point it is important to highlight Dr. Fischer's recurrent discomfort with images and references associated with confrontation and war. This seems often to be a hallmark of modern liberal thinking. Nothing is really worth going to war over, or dying for. This is partly a poisonous legacy of the Viet Nam war experience, and partly the result of a generation or two of young Americans having an abundance of material goods, and too little history of searing sacrifice.

An impression arises as one reads Fischer's phrases regarding a "wrangle about politics" or a "worry about her sexual preference." The impression is that Fischer sees such matters as trivial, or only focused on by somewhat petty people. This despite the fact that
these and other such matters will largely determine the context of the world in which we have to live on a daily basis. It would be instructive to ascertain just what issues, decisions, or situations would command passion, or sacrifice, or confrontation within the framework of such an intellectual mindset.

Tolerance seems to be the operative word in Fischer's recommendation for avoiding the horrors of potential war, cultural and otherwise. Unfortunately, the example selected for the application of this prescription again misses the mark. The need for tolerance among conflicting points of view regarding therapeutic technique, and the equally needful caution to not force ones views on the client are self evident. This says little or nothing about the world outside the fifty minute hour. As an aside, it is instructive to compare the liberal rhetoric regarding tolerance even in the therapeutic community and the recent attempt by the “other” APA to brand all therapists as unethical who attempt to help willing homosexuals change.

Looking a bit closer at Dr. Fischer’s application of tolerance to the issue of homosexuality is useful in illustrating the inadequacy of the solution. To be sure, the shunning of physical violence aimed at homosexuals is basic. Tolerance toward those who engage in such behavior in their own private life is to be taught. Loving the sinner and despising the sin is the ideal to be emulated. Human help in whatever form feasible should be marshalled to any who wish to leave behind such thoughts and practices.

However, the wisdom of allowing active homosexuals to serve in certain specific jobs including portions of the military should be seriously questioned and debated. Taking a dogmatic “scientific” position on such a question is at least premature, and perhaps impossible. Conferring upon homosexuals the special status of a minority is not a professional or scientific issue. This kind of battle must be fought by individuals and organizations other than those referenced in my essay. One would hope that the vast bulk of active LDS people would be in opposition to the attempt to legitimize immorality by perverting a reasonable cause: that of human civil rights. Toward the radical extreme of this brief continuum of scenarios, the movement to legitimize homosexual
marriages should be passionately and relentlessly fought. However, doing so is not the role of traditional professional groups.

The point of this illustration is to assert that with regard to a number of issues it is clearly undesirable to avoid confrontation on at least some levels of human interaction. Tolerance can be both ineffective and totally inappropriate.

The other central difficulty with Dr. Fischer's recommendation is that it partakes generously of what I would refer to as the "tea party" mentality. By this I mean that it seems to be implied that people are to be assumed to be of good will. Thus, disagreements are part of the diversity of human personality, and that they can either be peacefully resolved, or safely left coexistent with our own.

Such a comforting belief system is refuted by the entire course of history, both mortal and pre-mortal. While personality is certainly diverse, so is the intent and basic nature of individuals. There are those on virtually all sides of an issue who are either ignorant, or misinformed, or who take a position while having minimal dedication to it.

Likewise, there are those who for various reasons are gullible or subject to duplicity in a cause without truly being conversant with either its true import or content. In addition, however, there are also others who because of their own involvement in sin, or affinity for darkness, power, money, or aggrandizement, know full well what they are advocating and why they are advocating it. Among these are many of the militant homosexuals, gender feminists, and committed intellectuals. It is my assertion that a substantial number of psychology's leadership on a national level, fall within this category. Others simply find it fashionable to be liberal, or have so little conviction to the contrary that they acquiesce.

What I have referred to as the "tea party" mentality is helpless against those who are deeply dedicated to a cause. This obtains somewhat due to an aversion for conflict and warfare, and somewhat due to the inability to fully acknowledge or recognize neither the nature nor intensity of evil. Their's is the realm of dialogue, tolerance, persuasion, and at worst, economic sanctions.
Such lack of discernment and will, can, depending upon the nature of the conflicted issue, result in physical or spiritual death.

It is my assertion that in addition to mere human disagreement and diversity, we are seeing the age old issues involved with the war to save or destroy souls, being played out on the stage of the behavioral sciences and their associated organizations. One of the best known of modern dispensation revelations (Doctrine and Covenants 89), was delivered as a warning in consequence of the subtle ploys of the adversary in the last days. To take literary license with Burke, it may be pointed out that all that is necessary to enable evil to triumph is for good men and women to be sufficiently tolerant.