

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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## prophecy or expediency?

I would like to respond to Mr. Daryl J. Turner's "new semiofficial position of the Church" regarding the former status of blacks and priesthood eligibility (*Dialogue* XII:4, Letters).

With a tone of deep moral indignation Mr. Turner argues that "we" (the Church) never had a rational "excuse" for the doctrine in the first place, maintaining that "It was necessary for a time, until most whites matured sufficiently to see that all men are brothers. At that time it (the ban) was discarded, having served its purpose." He concludes from this line of reasoning that, at best, church leaders, and God himself, were acting from justifiable expediency (which here would be something like justifiable homicide, sparing whites a little discomfort at the expense of the blacks, who no doubt in this scheme were the result of an unfortunate miscalculation in the original genetic programming of the human race).

Lumping such crucial practices as priesthood eligibility and even polygamy into the tolerant arms of *expediency* seems to deny the Church truly divine direction in favor of an apparently rational and historically conditioned motivation.

The central issue in this: Are members of the Church, and the world in general, reliant on incompetent prophets who are themselves reliant on the capricious winds of historical fashion and social expediency? Carried to its logical consequence, our effort to justify (instead of explain) in turn each of the Lord's mandates to the prophets becomes a denial of the Lord's right to dictate those doctrines and policies. We might also humbly recall that the Lord has categorically informed us that, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9)

In the instance of denial of the priesthood to blacks, it should also be recalled that the vast majority of the earth's inhabitants up to this point has been denied any and all access to the gospel in its fullness, let alone to the priesthood!

To blatantly deny the Church's prophets and members of their generally acknowledged, profound sense of justice and charity is to label, ironically, the most socially progressive institution on earth callous and inhumane. Moreover, such labeling would effectively make a shambles of the claim to true "conversion" of the Christian, that process that changes one from a selfish state to a (hopefully) charitable one. This denial is especially illogical when we accept the restoration of the true gospel of Christ with its gift of direct and constant revelation.

Mr. Turner's efforts at doctrinal updating fail to impress. More tragically, they completely deny the prophets and apostles their right to special insight and divine communication. We see once again the word of prophecy made the servant of the skeptic's earthbound notion of cause and effect. Mr. Turner has applied the "tail wagging the dog" formula; I suggest he take a broader look at his own version of a Creator victimized by a capricious history.

Steve Porter

Los Angeles, California

## to act or to be acted upon?

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and those who work on *Dialogue* for a truly excellent publication. As I have read through the back copies and present editions, I have never failed to be absorbed in *Dialogue*. I have found it informative, controversial, uplifting, annoying, parochial and as many adjectives as there have been contributors. One thing is always consistent: *Dialogue* is always, always a jolly good read!

I noticed that among the Board of Editors there are one or two sociologists, and I wonder if I may be so bold as to make a suggestion with them in mind. As I have ransacked the University of Victoria at Manchester, particularly the mountains of obscure American periodicals, I have found many articles about "Mormons." A good proportion of these are "factual" in that they report Mormon activities. The remainder seek to find in

the history of the saints factors that explain what the Mormons are. Implicit in the latter are arguments about the authenticity of the claims of Joseph Smith, and Mormonism as a product of particular socio-economic conditions in the America of the time. (There is a tendency to forget the many British and Scandinavian converts who helped build the Church in Utah.)

Why don't sociologists look at an ordinary ward and attempt to use the beliefs held by its members as a resource for understanding how Mormons form a community into an ongoing dynamic achievement? Such an approach would avoid sterile arguments about transcendental social forces and the validity of beliefs and concentrate upon people as *creators* of society rather than as *creations* of society.

I hope someone may see something in this approach that would avoid further rambling into the "us and them" problem of "who is right?" and would instead treat Mormons as a group in Western society coping with an everyday existence, armed with certain resources which are seen as useful.

To those who see such a subjective approach as anathema to "science," I would point out that science hasn't become a new religion as some commentators suggest; rather, in trying to apply itself to "society" it has forgotten to tell us it is amoral. I feel it important to connect the subjective to the objective because then we have a fuller picture of people as people rather than as objects. I feel this strongly because in my society much of what is "scientific" is also popularly de-emphasized "right," and the consequence seems to be confusion and social dislocation.

Science (in this instance, social science) should look more closely at its research material and less at paradigms that get confused with faith. In fact, the less Latter-day Saints will treat science as a sacred cow, the more likely they will be able to find the mechanisms that allow us all to be "free will" actors in a world that is more than the correlation of variables. Compté's religion of positive philosophy eventually looked ridiculous; perhaps in

this century we should be as critical of the claims of empiricism and scientific ethos.

The individual is the concern of God. Should it not be ours too?

Nigel Johnson  
Manchester, England

#### kudos

I would like you to know how much I appreciated the issue which featured T. Edgar Lyon. He was always my favorite church teacher, but I thought that might be because he used to say he could always get the right answer from me, and I was flattered. Now I see that he probably made everyone feel as special as he did me.

I do thank you for your devotion to *Dialogue*. We all know that it has to be a labor of love. The content is good now, and it's coming on time. Please accept our heartfelt thanks.

Beth Greenhalgh  
San Mateo, California

I've been an avid *Dialogue* reader from the very first issue, and I feel a deep debt of gratitude to you and the others who have brought this vital breath of fresh air into my life.

Jerald Izatt  
Quebec, Montreal, Canada

Wow! Congratulations to Mr. Michael Graves for the first well-designed cover ever to appear on the journal! (Winter 1979—how come I just got it?)

Graydon Briggs, D.D.S.  
Salt Lake City, Utah

*We changed printers and so were delayed. Ed.*

#### jingles jangle

I look forward eagerly to getting my copies of *Dialogue*, and when they reach me, they are really read. Even those awful poems. The poems, or most of them, impress me as the equivalent of the poems I used to read in Mrs. Butcher's *Relief Society Magazine*.

I am of the Carlyle school of appreciation and think a poem must, as he said, express a deep thought in beautiful words, and that thoughts not of that quality should be set forth in plain words and not be put in a jingle. He said that, or

something like that, in his essay on Shakespeare and Dante as Heroes. I accepted that principle in my early youth, and still hold to it as a true definition of a poem.

Harold J. Butcher  
Anchorage, Alaska

**who is curtis wright?**

In our introduction to "A Conversation with Hugh Nibley" we inadvertently left off the biographical information for one of our interviewers. Curtis Wright is Professor of Library Science and Religion at Brigham Young University and the recipient of the second degree in Greek to be awarded at B.Y.U. under Hugh Nibley in 1951. *Ed.*

Gene Sessions, *Dialogue's* book review editor since 1978, has been released with more than the usual vote of thanks. Though he will continue to write his Brief Notices he must turn his energies to finishing his book: *Mormon Thunder: A Documentary History of Jedediah Morgan Grant*. Our readers and our staff are grateful for Gene's independent spirit and his indefatigable attention to Mormon publishing.