

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

brick by brick

I was glad to read "The Cloning of Mormon Architecture" by the female author, Martha Sonntag Bradley. However, she missed some very vital feelings on the coldness of today's church financing. Being raised as bishop's daughter during the fun fundraising years in the fifties, I felt real pain as an adult when approached for building fund money. The mother of a young family struggling on one income, I had nothing to give but my talents, and this was unacceptable. For having grown up through an era that put more value on my talents than my money, I was really turned off. The meager amount I was able to siphon from the grocery money to feel like our family was contributing to the million dollar church house, was degrading and demeaning.

Since I grew up Mormon, my whole world revolved round ward building banquets, ward building carnivals, ward building bazaars, etc. Talents and budding M.C.'s flourished throughout the whole community. Mormons and non-Mormons participated during the building period, and I was surprised to learn later on that Brother So-and-So was never a Mormon, or Brother So-and-So drank beer and coffee, or Sister So-and-So was somebody's mother and no one ever told her. All barriers of discrimination broke down to build a new church house. No one was too coy not to participate and it created bonding that no glue would ever make. We each knew we had to "Put our Shoulder to the Wheel," and each Sunday we watched a temperature chart in the foyer telling us how much more money we had to go. It made us aware at a very young age that money took work, and money management was learned too. When they dedicate a million dollar church house today, I feel nothing, but back then, our \$23,000 church house was valued to the last brick. As a primary child I was elated in giving my pennies to color in a church brick on the stand. It filled my heart with more pride than any of my birthday pennies accomplished for Primary Hospital. I could color a brick, I could see it "fitting" in. It gave me a "fitting" in feeling that I'm sad to say my

children will never experience in community living.

Our testimonies grew right along with the building. Life stories were compared to nails, hammers, saws, floors, ceilings, bricks, windows, and ward members never hesitated to retell their testimonies. That was a living church for me back then, and nowadays when I read in the Saturday church section of L.D.S. churches being dedicated with smiling men standing in front of their "Cloned Architecture," I get real hostile because I know they don't know what church houses are really made of.

Mary Jean Uebelgunne
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economy vs. individuality

As one who has railed about the standard plan architecture that reigns in the Church, I was happy to see Martha Sonntag Bradley's "Cloning" article. It was the first one I read in this issue and I really enjoyed it. I hadn't realized how the policy of cloning buildings had evolved, or how it functioned in building chapels, stake centers and temples. I appreciated her comments at the close of her paper about the stifling of creative thought and effort, and the effect of eliminating diversity. I would agree with her wholeheartedly were it not for some of my experiences with some other methods of building church facilities.

I was raised as a Presbyterian. My parents are still Presbyterian and are members of the session, or governing body, of their local congregation. Each congregation in the Presbyterian Church has the responsibility for building and maintaining its own church buildings. There is no Church Architect or Church Building Committee, or whatever. Each congregation hires its own architect and builds its own buildings. And pays for them. Sometimes the results are spectacular, but the process doesn't guarantee that the buildings will reflect local needs or even be well designed. I have seen church kitchens with room for only a 10 cubic foot refrigerator (try putting on a church dinner when all the cold foods have to be stored in portable coolers in the Sunday

School rooms) and designs that had the entrance to the men's restroom inside the women's restroom (that one was corrected before construction started). One sanctuary's acoustics were so bad that the sermon was unintelligible in the last third of the sanctuary. In other words, individuality is not synonymous with quality. Perhaps the bad buildings were outnumbered by the good ones, but that is of little solace to the congregations trying to cope with them. I know the standard plans have many flaws—our chapel exhibits some of the worst, but the solution may not necessarily lie with turning the responsibility over to local wards.

My mother, who has served on several church building committees over the years, and who has served "ex officio" when my father was on the committees, thinks the nicest thing about the Mormons is that they have standard plans for their churches. (That may say something about our public relations, but I digress.) She has lived with the congregational battles over how large the sanctuary should be versus how large the pastor's office should be. Whether to carpet the nursery or put a fireplace in the fellowship hall. How big a storage closet should the Boy Scouts have. She has seen how congregations have almost been split when they tried to expand their Sunday School facilities. The human effort that goes into building a church is immense, and it usually comes at the expense of activities that are more central to the gospel of Christ. "No, I can't help with the well-baby clinic this week, I have to meet with the architect that day." "Sorry, I won't be able to teach Sunday School this winter, I'm acting as electrical subcontractor for the new addition." My father once pointed out in a session meeting that far more of the congregation's budget was going to building and maintenance than to service and outreach (the Presbyterian missionary program). He wondered if they weren't building a golden calf out of red bricks and mortar.

Although I almost hate to bring it up, the issue of economy is a valid one. Our ward requests that the members donate 4% of their income to the budget building fund. Some wards in the area request

5%. This is, of course, over and above the other financial requirements of Church membership—tithing, fast offerings, the expenses associated with Church service. How much more would it be if we didn't share our chapel with two other wards? If we were carrying a thirty-year mortgage for an individually designed building? What with tithing, budget, fast offerings, Temple trips, savings for children's missions, etc., it is easy for 20 to 25% of my gross income to be devoted to the church as it is. I might be able to afford more, but I would hesitate to ask it of every family in the ward.

No, I don't like our cookie cutter churches very much. I don't like having a gym right outside the chapel. (Yes, I know it's called a cultural hall, but those lines on the floor and the basketball hoops make it a gym to me.) Our Sunday School rooms are all wrong for our needs. There are blackboards in the nursing mothers room and none in the Junior Sunday School room. The art in the building is poor. The foyer is designed as a people trap. The acoustics in the chapel are lousy. And yes, the kitchen is totally inadequate for ward suppers. I would like to see church buildings that can inspire reverence and worship. It's just that I've lived through some attempts to create such buildings under another system and am left wondering if they were really worth the costs.

Catherine Wright Alexander
Spokane, Washington

what the living can live with

I suspect that Lincoln Oliphant's major thesis that there is an ERA-abortion connection [Spring, 1981] is essentially correct, but I so strongly disagree with the assumptions and value judgments with which he surrounds this thesis, that I feel compelled to respond. The most obvious example of this is Oliphant's notion that an ERA-abortion connection implies that we should oppose the Equal Rights Amendment. For me, the prospect that passage of the ERA would strengthen the guarantees of a woman's right to exercise her free agency in the choice of how to use her reproductive resources supplies me with yet another excellent reason to support the ERA.

I find Oliphant's arguments against the ERA and the 1973 Supreme Court decision on abortion equally unconvincing. He objects to the ERA because it fits with the "view of the Constitution as a *living, dynamic document*" (emphasis his). What does he want the Constitution to be—a *dead, stagnant document* (emphasis mine)? Why on earth would we want to interpret the 14th amendment (his example) in the way the legislative committee which drafted it intended? Is the nineteenth-century mind so obviously better equipped to understand the problems of the twentieth century than we are? Personally, I believe in progress and I am glad that we are more sensitive to social injustice now than they were a hundred years ago.

Oliphant accuses ERA supporters of inconsistencies and trying to "have it both ways," but if he wants some really good examples of inconsistencies and having it both ways, he ought to do a careful—or even casual—analysis of the rhetoric of the antiabortionists. At least ours are subtle—theirs are blatant. He, himself, gets caught trying to have it both ways at several points. One example is his cry of dismay that "these people" want to use government "for imposing their favorite projects upon their fellows." It is different, of course, when he wants to use government to impose his favorite project—coerced childbirth—upon his fellows (although he probably would not impose it upon fellows—it is more acceptable to impose upon women).

He correctly calls some prochoice people to task for suggesting that abortion is analogous to kidney disease, but does not seem to realize that his own analogies are just as faulty. Abortion is not kidney surgery, but neither is it embezzlement—and to suggest that it is similar is to miss the central moral dilemma of abortion, which is making a choice between conflicting rights. His discussion of abortion fails to confront this basic moral question and thus leaves the moral dimension to become merely moralistic.

This is particularly distressing because his major complaint against the courts is the idea that "abortion and childbirth, when stripped of the sensitive moral

arguments surrounding the abortion controversy, are simply two alternative medical methods of dealing with pregnancy." The proper response to this idea is to refuse to strip it of moral arguments. The problem is that the antiabortionists have substituted moralistic rhetoric for meaningful moral reasoning and the court is right in refusing to impose moralistic prohibitions upon us. What we need to do is to bring the dialogue back into the moral realm. Simply making abortion illegal works against moral choice. We must be sensitive to the rights of the unborn, but also to the rights of the already born. We need a position that the living can live with.

I cannot adequately present such a position in a letter, but a fuller treatment of my views appears in *Sunstone* (Vol. 6, No. 4).

Marvin Rytting
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interesting reading

I find it interesting to read what others write about the Adam-God controversy. When we can understand that Elohim is of Hebrew origin, meaning divine spirit, whom we worship in spirit and in truth, it is perfectly acceptable to me to believe that the Ancient of Days is the Father-God, and Jehovah is the Beloved Son, the Only One Begotten, ordained and anointed to be our Redeemer!

This doctrine is in Christian literature and hymns from centuries ago. It did not originate with Mormonism. To me it is the answer to who is our personal God—male and female, Adam and Eve, and our potential as sons and daughters of God!

I enjoyed "A Conversation with Beverly Campbell." I agree that women resent doing household chores as a duty, with no opportunity to express our feelings about anything.

We have honest desires to use our brain and our brawn with initiative, in powerful endeavors. When we are allowed to do so, a woman's power and influence can be great! We can respond to positive stimulus with joyful enthusiasm, and a whole new world of opportunities opens to our vision, to serve with love our fellow

human beings. I find this spirit, this desire to serve their Lord, in Christian and Mormon women.

Rhoda Thurston
Hyde Park, Utah

study precedes the revelation

In a recent *Dialogue* article entitled "Revelation: The Cohesive Element in International Mormonism" (Winter 1980), C. Seshachari said that "The Church, both in its doctrine and in its hierarchical flow chart, is singularly equipped to sustain and further that sense of cohesiveness" that "transcends national and cultural barriers." The obvious solution given for problems of internationalization was revelation. To me this is reminiscent of a commonly expressed attitude about this matter: rely on the Spirit and don't worry (i.e., think) too much about inter-cultural problems. At the 1976 Expanding Church Symposia a church leader closed the proceedings by stressing the theme, "things are getting better." Again it was stressed that the Spirit will solve all such problems if we just rely on it. I believe so. But things are also getting worse.

Would it detract from the Spirit too much if we were ever to emphasize the need to intellectually and practically grapple first-hand with gospel-related international problems? To simply assure us in doctrinal terms that the sufficient mechanisms are in place (as solutions *per se*) not only avoids the need to think *situationally* about such problems but it tends to engender a superficial, non-involving optimism. After all, the Spirit has to rely on us too.

It seems to me that what is needed just as much (but is stressed less often) is personal knowledge about, and involvement in, the realities and problems "out there." We need to spread out more. We need more reports or analyses of social realities, as opposed to only doctrinal depictions of ideal solutions, in order to develop a problem-solving attitude. This is the only justifiable optimistic orientation. And in fact, profound organizational and doctrinal changes have occurred recently. We may ask, "Were they overdue?" and "What changes are yet needed?"

And as Max Weber emphasized, "it is not the doctrines *per se* which are of social force, but the cultural meanings which are attached to them." Revelation usually comes after questions and "felt needs" (to think about it in situational terms). Hence the occurrence and implication of revelation is, in part, socially structured and personally and socially acted out. We need to consider "how often" and "under what conditions" "who of those among us" walk by revelation. Obviously revelation *can be* a cohesive element, but what needs our energy is the question "How can it be?" How is doctrine interpreted crossculturally? Is it simply standardized by the Spirit? How do patron-client relations affect church callings in Latin America? Is it possible that the revelation on priesthood extension came when it did, instead of earlier, because we members weren't ready for it and the leaders weren't asking until then? Why not at the time just before the fruition of the U.S. civil rights movement in the early 60s, when tens of thousands of converted Biafrans, and others of the uncounted "elect," were waiting? There may be some connection. Who knows?

Are questions sometimes not asked because of distance or ethnocentrism? What does a missionary do when a poor branch member in a developing country (who happens to comply with the norm of "no birth control" and have thirteen kids) asks the elder to pay for a long-term supply of anti-hookworm medicine for one of his ailing children? Should he simply follow the hopefully-inspired mission directive against financially helping any members, even though no welfare mechanism has been set up at the time to assist this poor and isolated branch? Or should he seek differing inspiration? What needs for personal knowledge and inspiration may have gone unmet here at the church, mission, missionary and family levels? And why so?

The scenario is more fruitfully discussed as an essentially problematic one, where the would-be receptacle of revelation happens to be seen as a social being. We know that the Almighty is ready "to pour down knowledge from heaven upon the heads of the Latter-day Saints." But

where are the heads? Aspiring to the honors of men? And where are the hearts? Set upon the things of this world?

Douglas L. Vermillion
Salatiga, Java, Indonesia

outsiders' objectivity

I am baffled by Gary Gillum's review of Robert Hullinger's *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (Fall, 1980 *Dialogue*, pp. 136–138). While I realize that those who read the review are probably not now inclined to bother reading the book, I suggest that if you do read the book, you will conclude that it deserves a more serious review.

Gillum begins with a ridiculous comparison of Hullinger's book and Schonfield's *Passover Plot*. He informs the reader that Hullinger uses faulty logic, but he never bothers to show us that faulty logic. I think he errs when he says that Hullinger lifts Book of Mormon passages out of context. He gives no examples. He suggests that Hullinger's conclusions are at variance with the conclusions predicted for the reader in Wesley Walters' foreword, which is not the case.

It is news to me that "all Lutherans" are "tradition-bound to the inerrancy of scripture." Is it really not possible that Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* could have been a "burning issue" in western New York in the late 1820s because it had been published nearly forty years earlier? Are we really supposed to believe that the Book of Mormon's location of Jesus' birth in Jerusalem can be harmonized with the Bethlehem tradition of Matthew and Luke because residents of a modern metropolis may say they live in Los Angeles when they really live in North Hollywood? (More likely, Jesus was not born in either Bethlehem or Jerusalem.)

Gillum's real problem in reviewing the book is a problem he readily admits: he feels duty bound to prove Hullinger wrong because he feels that Hullinger feels duty bound to prove Mormonism wrong. Actually, Hullinger's analysis is very fair, and Gillum himself admits it is "one of the most charitable and objective studies of Joseph Smith ever written by a non-Mormon." Apparently Gillum is

bothered by the fact that, despite the charitable and objective approach, Hullinger assumes that the Book of Mormon was written by Joseph Smith rather than merely translated by him. For Gillum, Hullinger cannot see "the Big Picture." He feels that Hullinger and Wesley Walters "both seem to value their 'scholarly ability' to explain Mormonism more than the Mormonism they're trying to explain."

We owe a great debt to the work of several non-Mormon scholars in the past generation who have given us important insights by examining Mormonism from an objective, outsider's perspective. Hullinger's book is one of these, and deserves more than cheap putdowns by reviewers who essentially are bothered by the fact that Hullinger does not view Mormonism from the perspective of acceptance of the Mormon faith-story.

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divisive dialogue

As readers of *Dialogue*, most of us have an interest in an educated discussion of gospel related topics. Indeed, to "foster scholarly achievement" is one of the purposes of the journal, and, therefore, as readers we must be willing to enter the discussion with some disposition to entertain ideas which we may not initially agree with. Hence, such a dialogue depends on our willingness to talk and listen on an academic level.

The above point of view seems obvious enough, but recently I was dismayed by a letter which depreciates the discussion we want to engage in.

Because my dispute with Mr. Tanner's letter (Vol. XIII, no. 3) is ethical and not doctrinal, it is important to consider the consequences of the doctrine advanced by Mr. Tanner. In his letter he laments that more gospel scholars do not apply the same critical analysis to the gospel as they apply to their own fields of study. I believe that he refers to those who try to keep their secular and ecclesiastical lives separate as "two headed monsters." Mr. Tanner then advances his own rational analysis of the gospel. He states

that the only evidence for the doctrine of eternal progression is the lip service that Church members give it. He claims that all answers to prayer, whether Mormon or aboriginal, are more wishful thinking than reality, and that revelation is a result of political necessity. He characterizes those who believe in such doctrines as having a twelve- to fifteen-year-old mentality. Those who do not believe in such doctrines are those who "are above that intellectual level and would look at the matter analytically and see it somewhat differently." Despite Mr. Tanner's assertions that eternal progression is a sham and that answers to prayer are anything but divinely inspired, he does not propose to eliminate the concept of God. After making such assertions, it is curious that Mr. Tanner does not proceed logically to the next step—declaring that God does not exist.

However, with analysis, Mr. Tanner's motive becomes transparent. By deriding those who believe in God and in a doctrine of eternal progression and by praising those who have submitted their former beliefs to rational analysis, Mr. Tanner intends to do one thing; he intends to make a clear discrimination between believers and non-believers. The concept of God is useful in Mr. Tanner's scheme because it identifies who belongs to which group. Mr. Tanner's proposal that scholarly discussion be enhanced is, therefore, divisive. He alienates the believers by deprecating their mentality, and he attempts to rally non-believers by praising reason and objective thinking. Such division can accomplish little for those interested in an academic discussion. Mr. Tanner himself admits that a dialogue would be impossible under such circumstances. He says that one must come to a realization of such matters alone, and then he asks, "once accom-

plished, what is the point in writing about it to another who already has arrived at this realization?"

Mr. Tanner assumes that individual analysis will yield a single realization, and perhaps he gives too much credit to analytical thought, but under the circumstances delineated by Mr. Tanner the only possibilities for communication are two. First, one group can make disparaging remarks about the other group. Or, second, the members of each group can praise themselves, rejoicing that they are not as misguided as the members of the other group. This kind of in-group rhetoric does nothing to promote a dialogue; in fact, the situation Mr. Tanner advocates inhibits any kind of discussion whatsoever. Mr. Tanner's is a rhetoric of division, meant to prevent communication between groups of different beliefs. His lament that L.D.S. scholars do not publish is, therefore, self-contradictory because it fosters the very thing it proposes to eliminate.

As someone interested in an intellectual discussion of the gospel as it relates to secular experience, I cannot accept Mr. Tanner's position. Nor as someone who hopes for certain changes to be made in the Church, can I accept Mr. Tanner's position. If Mr. Tanner were trying to encourage an educated dialogue, or if he were trying to effect a change, he would not propose the line of demarcation that he does. In fact, I suspect that Mr. Tanner is not interested in changing the intellectual level that he sees as so deplorable; he is interested in creating or preserving it. What is in question here is not the intellectual level of Church members; what is in question is Mr. Tanner's ethic.

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