
LETTERS

brodie's ruler

It is strange how our "liberated" Mormon intellectuals are willing to take a piece of scientific knowledge and run with it *ad absurdum* under the banner of truth just as devotedly as our "enslaved" brothers of faith.

Over and over again we see the extreme positions taken by our friends leaving the fold. If they could just find something that absolutely refutes the Church, then they can leave it comfortably. Then when something comes along—particularly if draped in intellectual terms—which approaches refutation, they jump on it and hold on for dear life, come what may, so that they can forever afterwards prove they have chosen rightly.

In the summer 1981 issue Fawn Brodie reportedly related:

I was convinced before I ever began writing the book that Joseph Smith was not a true prophet — to use an old Mormon phrase. Once I learned about the scientific evidence, which is overwhelming, that the American Indians are Mongoloid, I was no longer a good Mormon. That was relatively easy. It seemed to me that it was decisive.

According to the interview, that would have been over thirty years ago since her book was published in 1945.

An anthropologist I am not. But it seems to me that there has been considerable published since 1945 to indicate that a pure Mongoloid interpreta-

tion of American Indian ancestry is much too limited and simplistic. And yet towards the end of her life, thirty years after publication of her book exposing the Mormon "fraud," she still clings fast to the level of science of the early 1940s which reinforced her prejudice and allowed her to escape from the philosophical clutches of Mormonism.

Brodie says she was a self-taught historian. I don't have any beef with that. But would Brodie's book really qualify for history or would it be more accurate to create a new category for it similar to that for Alex Haley's *Roots*, such a mixture of history and fantasy as not to qualify for consideration under either category?

Brodie talks about the Book of Mormon being a remarkable fantasy. She said of Joseph Smith, "I think he mixed up his own dreams and later came to call them visions."

Then she talks about her own writing experience. "I was working with non-Mormon, anti-Mormon, and Mormon material and I would get three different versions of the same episode—always two, sometimes three—and when I put them together a picture emerged THAT I BELIEVE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH ME, nothing to do with my selection." Further she says, "a picture emerged so often as I wrote these chapters that

I thought this must be the way it happened."

Is this a description of how she wrote her history or a description of how she says Joseph Smith wrote his "American Indian History"? They seem inseparable. If hers is history, is not his just as much history if written according to her interpretation and judged by her own standards?

Brodie says, "I had made speculations about the nature of Joseph Smith's relations, and with his brothers in particular, and with his father and how that got into the Book of Mormon." Do her speculations qualify any more as history than Joseph Smith's, or mine or yours?

When Brodie speculates and puts a picture together which emerges such "that I believe had nothing to do with me," it is history, speculative history, if you will, that turns out in her evaluation to be prophetic. When Joseph Smith does the same — according to her "psychological" analysis — it is fraudulent fantasy!

The beauty of science should be its development of standards of measurement by which to judge the facts, not to suit the "facts." Many of our Mormon critics enamored with scientific method have not been entirely fair and honest in appraising their own scientific integrity.

This is not to pretend by any means

that our Mormon faithful have not been equally negligent in applying consistent standards to interpretation and defense of their perceptions of the faith. But a rubber ruler hardly refutes an elastic one.

Stephen Hammer
Santa Monica, California

dear dialogue

The relentless flow of time has brought me to the point where I must terminate my long and pleasant association with *DIALOGUE*. At age 89, I suddenly find myself a widower. My reading is limited mainly to the headlines, and I am deaf. Of course, as friends are aware, reading, writing, research, and teaching have been my career. Well, as Jimmie Durante used to say, "That is the condition that prevails."

DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT has served and is serving a highly important and constructive purpose. There was an urgent need for a medium through which Mormon scholars and writers could find an outlet for penetrating study of Mormonism. The official organs of the Church are mainly concerned with indoctrination and organizational information. They are closed to articles of intellectual depth.

But DIALOGUE has opened many windows on the broader aspects and significance of Mormonism. May it continue.

Lowry Nelson
Provo, Utah

word of wisdom status

I found the recent Word of Wisdom articles very enlightening. However, rather than neglect the 1830s with vague references to the unpublished M.A. thesis of Paul Peterson, Drs. Bush and McCue ought to have summarized at least briefly the actual ways in which D&C 89 was then applied or ignored.

It might have been interesting to note, for example, that Presidents John Whitmer and David Whitmer, and Clerk Oliver Cowdery were removed from their high council offices for drinking tea and coffee, among other things. (David Whitmer also used tobacco; "Far West Record," pp. 95, 97, Jan. 26 - Feb. 5, 1838.) Among the charges sustained against Oliver Cowdery during his trial of excommunication, April 12, 1838, was a charge of his having violated the Word of Wisdom (FWR, pp. 118-26). All this undoubtedly reflected the very strong and clear-cut view enunciated at the General Assembly of the Church in Far West, 7 November, 1837, in which the Word of Wisdom was specifically interpreted to forbid the use of alcoholic beverages, tea, coffee, and tobacco — a commandment to be strictly obeyed (FWR, pp. 82-85; cf. pp. 106, 117, 129-30, 132-35; wine continued to be used in the sac-

rament of the Lord's Supper, of course, p. 71).

Who reduced the stringency of Joseph's revelation by adding a short introduction which later became an integral part of the canon? Who had the motive, opportunity, and means? O. Cowdery, J. Whitmer, and W.W. Phelps constituted the 1832 committee appointed to review, select, and correct the commandments for publication (FWR, p. 27; cf. pp. 18-19), and the addition must have been made during that early stage, since the first publication took place in December 1833 or January 1834 (broadsheets, Special Collections, BYU Library). As Leonard Arrington has noted, Oliver Cowdery was not above altering originals and then lying about it (*Western Humanities Review*, 7:354, n. 43). Indeed, David Whitmer later stated that Oliver claimed to have been led into error by Sidney Rigdon in making changes in the revelations (letter of 9 Dec. 1886 in *Saints' Herald*, 34:93b; cf. *SH*, 54:230; FWR, p. 16). Whatever the case, Oliver and the Whitmers repeatedly made it clear that they had little respect for the revelations of Joseph Smith from 6 April 1830 forward (*Times & Seasons*, 4:108; *HC*, 1:217-218; *HRC*, 1:113-114; FWR, pp. 95-96, 120-121).

As with the United Order, Brigham's "new" emphasis on the Word of Wisdom was actually a reemphasis on something that had been tried before, albeit under the waxing and waning effect of strong socio-cultural influences.

Robert F. Smith
Independence, Missouri

presentism in prophetesses?

I very much enjoyed the Winter 1981 issue of *DIALOGUE*. The essays of Ms. Hansen and Mr. Hutchinson were of special interest to me. Within the limits which each set himself, their efforts were successful. I am surprised, however, that neither made what I believe to be the chief problem of the Mormon priesthood and the Old Testament more explicit.

The Old Testament is bad both as a proof text and as a historical document for Mormon theology. Unlike Mormonism, most of the males of ancient Israel were barred from the priesthood. Unlike Mormonism, the priesthood did not rule Israel. Unlike Mormonism, Jewish spiritual and theological leaders often stood outside of the priesthood. Most prophets made no reference to their priesthood and were openly critical of the mechanical aspects of the sacrificial cult led by the priesthood. Indeed, the prophets removed themselves from the circle of the priests and prelates. The prophets spoke as charismatic not as sacerdotal leaders. Many of the greatest formulators of Judaism were nonpriestly. In ancient times as today, there seems to have been a tendency in Judaism to ascribe power to men of piety and learning regardless of their socio-economic position.

To me it is essential that Mormonism cope with the fundamental questions of the relationship of its priesthood to Biblical models before it attempts to pronounce on questions like the authenticity of Deborah and Huldah as prophetesses.

By the way, Isaiah's wife is called a prophetess in Isa. 8:3, a term which

seems to mean no more than "Mrs. Prophet" in distinction to Deborah and Huldah who were prophetesses as Samuel and Nathan were prophets. There is a propensity among Mormons to believe that the kingdom of heaven is like contemporary Mormon society. This propensity leads to an incredible presentism when reading ancient records. I thank Ms. Hansen and Mr. Hutchinson for revealing something of that presentism.

Michael T. Walton
Salt Lake City, Utah

clones, but not enough

Less than two years ago I think I would have uttered a hearty "Amen" after reading Martha Sonntag Bradley's "The Cloning of Mormon Architecture" (14, Spring 1981). Now, after living and attending church abroad, I find it somewhat myopic and suffering from that "Wasatch Front intellectualism" that seems to think the problems found in that narrow strip of Zion from Ogden to Provo are pandemic throughout the Church. Had the author included a section on the temporary and makeshift meeting house, she would have seen that the issue facing the Church's building program is not "Will the Church build architecturally creative chapels or unoriginal, standardized ones," but, "Can the Church afford to build chapels at all?" The physical problem facing too many wards is not how to share a single building with two or three other wards but how to get a chapel built. Bradley's reluctant concession, "the fiscal and functional de-

fenses of standardization form a compelling argument" is a gross understatement.

The Tokyo ward I currently attend meets in one room about the size of a typical Relief Society room on the seventh floor of an office building. "Rooms" for Relief Society, Priesthood, Primary, Sunday School classes, etc., are created by pushing around makeshift partitions; more than once interviews have been held in the elevator, or if it is not raining, on the roof. When the need for another Sunday School class was brought up in bishopric meeting, the suggestion had to be shelved: simply no room. When I was a missionary in Japan, there were only two stakes; now, eight years later, there are twenty. These "one-room, make-do chapels" are repeated not only in Tokyo and Japan but also throughout Asia and South America. Cramped and ill-suited meeting places may be the stuff humorous anecdotes for homecoming talks are made of, but it is a pain to have to try and meet the needs of ward members in them.

Rapid church growth has been complicated by rising energy costs and inflation. Even the Lord's dollar (or peso or yen) does not go as far as it used to. Thus, unless we can find a real "dream mine," the budgetary restraints on church building must be reckoned with. Perhaps a more realistic solution to the cloning of church architecture is not an article on creative needs in architecture but a sermon on tithing.

The concept of a world-wide church suggests more than a chapel in Seoul, Korea, looking like one in Sandy, Utah. Rather it demands us to

ask if a basic tenet of the gospel — love thy neighbor as thy self — can allow one ward to build a chapel that "through the dramatic use of color, line, and light . . . creates a moving atmosphere of reverence and beauty" and a \$9,000 cost overrun, while another ward must meet in a makeshift chapel in an old warehouse?

Roger W. Purdy
Tokyo, Japan

black skin

My letter to DIALOGUE on the removal of "Pharaoh's Curse" should read "black skin" not "black sin." The misprint makes for interesting theological speculation, but that was not my intent!

Actually, Satan's sin (overbearing pride and ambition) is more of a "white" sin than a "black" one! Be that as it may, the change in the temple ceremony referred to "skin" not sin. Please correct.

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