

LETTERS

Hutchinson Challenged

Anthony Hutchinson, in his article, "LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible" (Summer 1982) describes and comments on four interpretive positions he sees among Latter-day Saint exegetes, asking us to give more serious consideration to one of those groups.

Group 1 he calls the "harmonizing hermeneutic" position. It contains the majority of those who write about scriptures in the Church. They are unfamiliar with biblical languages, subscribe to a propositional model of revelation, and rely upon conservative Protestant commentaries.

Group 2 he says is the "critically modified corrective hermeneutic" position. Those in this group also sound "a clear, dogmatic, apologetic tone"—but they show "more *a posteriori* thought, more dialectic between faith, experience, and evidence." James Talmage and B. H. Roberts are examples of writers in this group.

Group 3's approach is "critical hermeneutic with corrective tendencies." Hugh Nibley is probably the best known of this group. Its members generally know biblical languages, but "despite the general tendency towards free critical thought unpressured by dogmatic concern, there are occasional harmonizing patches in the writings of these authors."

Group 4, the group which he finally recommends, takes a position described as "critical historical and philological hermeneutic This group is characterized by familiarity with and acceptance of the mainstream of non-LDS biblical criticism."

I find several strengths in Hutchinson's article, but there are many points I find questionable. No more than a handful of

Latter-day Saints publically interpret the scriptures. Even if we can agree that Hutchinson's categories are clear and make sense, it seems quite difficult to confidently decide who goes in what group, especially when distinguishing between Groups 1 and 2.

A significant problem is that he claims each group has strengths and weaknesses but describes Group 1's strengths in language calculated to show them as weaknesses. He also glosses over Group 4's most significant weakness—that it doesn't give us a religion for human beings rather than scholars; Group 4's religion is not a religion of worship.

In addition, scholarly and devotional exegesis often overlap but they aren't necessarily the same thing. Hutchinson, however, assumes all the writers are doing the same thing. Some, Group 1 especially, might well be doing primarily devotional exegesis, regardless of appearances.

He criticizes Group 2 because it lacks credibility among those who do not share its view of the scriptures. But why is that a weakness? After all, Group 4 also lacks credibility in the eyes of those (namely Group 1) who don't share *its* view. From the point of view of Group 4, isn't that a strength? Perhaps Hutchinson is using some other criterion; if so, he ought to make it explicit.

Also, Hutchinson takes Group 3's failure to produce biblical commentaries or introductions as a weakness, without explaining why. Unless the failure is a consequence of the approach itself rather than of the audience, the publishers' policies, etc., it may well be unfortunate but it can't be a weakness. In addition, Hutchin-

son doesn't point out that both Group 4 and Group 1 generally have little knowledge of the languages involved, and rely heavily on authority, though each invokes a different authority.

The most significant difference, however, between Group 4 and the others is that Group 4 doesn't subscribe to "the harmonizing principle." My biggest objection to Hutchinson's article is his definition and use of this principle.

According to him, belief in the unity of the scriptures reveals a presupposition of inerrancy, and that, he implies, limits or prohibits honest textual evaluation. This claim and his implication are fundamental to Hutchinson's thesis; and since they are dubious at best, he ought to have argued them clearly rather than buried them in a footnote.

It isn't at all obvious that belief in a fundamental scriptural unity is necessarily belief in the absolute inerrancy of the relevant documents, doctrines, or interpretations, nor is Hutchinson's description of the harmonizing principle obviously accurate. One might mean many possible things by saying that the scriptures harmonize. There are probably even many ways in which one could believe the scriptures are inerrant.

Hutchinson, however, neglects the difficult but crucial questions of what it means to believe that the scriptures are in harmony, and he consistently uses only the most dogmatic, narrow definition of both harmony and inerrancy in describing the three categories with which he finds fault. As a result, according to the picture he paints, each of these three is merely a variation of a dogmatic, anti-intellectual theme rather than what is more likely — an entirely different view of the matter.

Since the scriptures are, by definition, the revelations of God's relation to humans, we should expect a great deal of diversity in them. Such revelations are, after all, given to diverse people in diverse conditions, cultures and times. But since one element, God, is the same in every case, we should expect harmony as well as

diversity. And since God is perfect, it is also quite reasonable to expect inerrancy. A position which rejects either harmony or inerrancy outright would seem to be one which necessarily drops God from the relation revealed, giving up revelation altogether and no longer viewing the scriptures as God's word.

Those who either tacitly or explicitly accept a harmonizing principle by definition believe that the texts are divine. Consequently they are committed to a belief that the scriptures are, in some sense, both inerrant and always the same. They do not, however, necessarily agree about what either "inerrant" or "the same" mean. Discussions of what it means for the scriptures to be the same throughout time could vary widely, from the naive to the dense and difficult, perhaps like the sameness in Hegel's *Logic* or Martin Heidegger's *Identity and Difference*. LDS exegetes could be expected to take a wide variety of implicit positions on the matter, some consistent, some contradictory, some naive, some sophisticated. Contrary to what Hutchinson has assumed, harmonizing can come in a myriad of forms, and whether one or another is illegitimate is a matter which must be carefully considered.

Hutchinson's overly simplistic views about the harmonizing principle are behind every judgment he makes about LDS scriptural interpretation, including his advocacy of Group 4, despite their inability to make the texts available for religious purposes or, in some cases, their own lack of religious commitment. Some in Group 4, such as Sterling McMurrin, have taken the same route as a good many Protestant and some Catholic intellectuals: they have abandoned particular religion, religion that opposes the claims of other religions. I doubt that such an abandonment can be pulled off without losing religion altogether.

Reduced to self-fulfillment, life affirmation, love, or somesuch, a religion is no longer a religion, it is an ethical system, a "philosophy of life." A religion cannot be reduced to an ethic. Neither can it be

reduced to profound experience or psychological phenomena, as important as these too may be. The content of an experience cannot be separated from the experience. My religious experience as a Latter-day Saint must be different from that of a Muslim because the content of the religions which we experience is different: I experience the truth of the Restoration; he/she experiences submission to Allah. Thus, removing a religion's doctrinal and, at least in the case of Christianity and Mormonism, historical content would annihilate it as surely as would removing its ethical content. An ethical system or a system for having some kind of profound experience might remain, but a religion would not and the ethical system would no longer be the same as the one found in the religion.

Among the Latter-day Saints, some Hutchinson locates in Group 3 have shown that it isn't necessary to give up particular religion in order to do honest, scholarly work. Hutchinson mentions Kent Brown of Brigham Young University as an example. Steven Robinson of Lycoming College, though Hutchinson doesn't seem to know him, is another. Edward Schillebeeckx and Raymond Brown are Catholic examples of genuinely religious and well-grounded exegetes. Such genuinely religious scholars exist among most if not all major religions, subscribing to some form of the harmonizing principle which Hutchinson would like us to abandon. It isn't necessary to give up particular religion or the harmonizing principle to do good scholarly work with the scriptures, even though to give up the harmonizing principle properly described is probably to give up genuine religion.

Hutchinson's careless use of the harmonizing principle results, I think, from his ignorance of contemporary hermeneutics. Modern hermeneutics is not just the study of exegetical methods or the actual making of interpretations. It is the study of the theory of human understanding in general and of textual exegesis in

particular. I have no reason to doubt his knowledge of biblical languages or of the scholarship of biblical exegesis. But the way he discusses the issues and the explanations he gives of hermeneutics in his notes and glossary show a definite lack of understanding of the issues and positions as they presently bear on the questions he addresses. For example, he agrees there can be no presuppositionless interpretation and, at the same time, castigates Barlow for saying that if our claims are genuine they must make a difference in our interpretations. But such a position is perfectly in line with almost every position taken in contemporary discussions of interpretation theory (hermeneutics). Brown's commentaries on the Gospel of John, for example, are masterful, insightful, and useful to anyone trying to understand the text. They are also obviously Catholic. His faith makes a difference to his interpretation. Anyone's faith must. Those are simply the exegetical facts of life.

Hutchinson also invokes historicity and its claims on the text's meaning, mentioning the *New Mormon History* as a good example of how we can lay hold of our history without unnecessary presuppositions. But hermeneutics is very suspicious of things like the *New Mormon History* (as Martin Marty made clear at the Mormon History Association meetings in Omaha in May, 1983). Whether history has an objective content, much less whether we can express that content, are hotly debated issues in hermeneutics. The consensus presently seems to be that history has no objective content. Thus, neither does an ancient text. Scholarly, honest work which results in valid interpretations is still possible according to most who take this view, but it isn't nearly as simple—even in principle—as Hutchinson would have us believe.

Hutchinson says that those who accept the principle of harmony seek agreement with our present understanding while good scholars seek agreement with the original form and sense of the text. Given the

debate which has raged in hermeneutics for at least fifteen years about the plausibility of that distinction (a distinction based on the presupposition of objective historical content), I must conclude that Hutchinson is unfamiliar with hermeneutical issues and positions. That's all right. Most people, even biblical exegetes, rightfully don't care much about the broader, theoretical questions in contemporary hermeneutics. But he shouldn't write about these issues or take up positions which require coming to grips with them unless he knows about them.

Finally, despite its importance, the primary issue in hermeneutics is not, as Hutchinson asserts, authorial intent, though that is an important issue. In addition to the question of history's objective content, the primary question is, what roles, positive and negative, do our presuppositions play in our interpretations? Hutchinson has quite blithely made all sorts of judgments about how the presupposition of harmony affects the exegesis of Latter-day Saints. He has not, however, been willing to consider how Group 4's presuppositions affect their interpretations or what role his own presuppositions play.

Hutchinson's call for care and scholarship in interpreting scriptures is long overdue for most Latter-day Saints. It is a call no thoughtful person could quarrel with. I suspect few who attend LDS Sunday Schools would quarrel with it. But his way of getting to that call is badly founded on badly thought-out ideas.

In fact, insofar as it might influence some to wrongly choose between harmonizing and scholarship, consequently rejecting either scholarship or a belief in the revealedness of the scripture, it is probably quite dangerous. In spite of his obvious and admirable desires to the contrary, anyone taking Hutchinson's article seriously might logically move to an amorphous, contentless religion or, in reaction become dogmatic, naive and ignorant. Thus, his recognition that Latter-day Saint scriptural study is in a sad state comes in such a way

that it is unlikely to do anything to make it better — and it could make it worse.

James E. Faulconer
Provo, Utah

The Only True Note Form

Among the many delights of spring this year was the discovery that *DIALOGUE* had, as part of the "restoration of all things," returned to the true *footnote* rather than the endnote format. Though its "apostate" interlude was understandably financial, it is inspiring to see that faith is once again found on the earth. May it be nurtured by our works, *i.e.* \$\$ donations.

Grant Underwood
Los Angeles, California

Unsettling Implications

After finishing George Smith's recent informative essay, "Isaiah Updated" (Summer 1983), I distinctly felt something was missing. His review of the scholarly, historical interpretations of Isaiac prophecy was fairly straightforward; however, I sensed Smith really wanted to discuss what he felt to be interpretative abuses of Isaiac prophecy by Mormon theologians. Although Smith raised a very important issue, he failed totally to develop this theme and its unsettling implications.

One of these implications concerns the validity of the LDS belief that the Book of Mormon is a literal history of ancient American civilizations. Assuming the concept of multiple authors composing the now-canonized book of Isaiah is valid and that chapters 40–66 were composed after Lehi departed into the wilderness, the inclusion of portions of these later chapters in the Book of Mormon clearly suggests that this 1830 publication was a latter-day amalgamation and not an historical compilation as many have purported.

Another issue hinted at by Smith concerns not only the nature of prophecy in

scripture but, more pointedly, the ability of both ancient and modern prophets to correctly interpret ancient prophecy. If his analysis is correct, Mormon prophets have been less than accurate in extrapolating upon ancient prophecy. How should Latter-day Saints then consider authoritarian pronouncements by modern church leaders in other areas of concern?

In response to Smith's closing question, "How should students of religion consider the effect of Mormon writings to 'update' Isaiah's words into a context foreign to the man, his message, his country, and his time?" I would have to reply, "Perplexed."

David John Buerger
Campbell, California

McMurrin Correction

In my review of Sterling M. McMurrin's book, *Religion, Reason and Truth*, the following quote should be understood as referring to orthodox religionists or fundamentalists and *not* liberals: "The fundamentalist is 'not genuinely interested in the truth; that his concern, rather, is simply to minister to his emotional life or possibly to promote the tyranny of a sacred book, perpetuate an antique theological tradition, or encourage submission to ecclesiastical authority.'"

Blake Ostler
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dollar Magnitude

The paper by David Whittaker was most interesting, but failed to give any clue to the dollar magnitude of the Church's money making.

Ward's Directory of 55,000 Largest Corporations (1981; published by Baldwin H. Ward, Box 380, Petaluma, Calif. 94953) lists religious organizations (pp. C-244, B-263.) The Corporation of the

President is listed with sales totaling \$750,000,000 and 10,500 employees. The LDS Church is listed as the number one organization for making money. No. 2 is the "Church Univ. Trimp" Calabasas, California, with sales of \$650 million and 400 employees; No. 3 is "General Council ASSE," Springfield, Missouri, with sales of \$72 million and 900 employees; and No. 4 is Herbert Armstrong's "Worldwide Church" with sales of \$62 million and 1000 employees.

While the Corporation of the President is not listed among the profit-making other companies, it does rank high on the list as one of the largest companies in the U.S., exceeding in sales such giants as San Diego Gas & Electric, Coors Adolph Co., National Semiconductor, Western Union, General Instruments, Lipton Tea, and Quaker State Oil.

One must wonder about the nature of a Church that is so profit motivated and involved in so many enterprises, including direct competition with private enterprise. Was Jesus (or Joseph Smith's) message make money?

R. Dean Terry
San Clemente, California

Greatest Thing Since Book of Mormon

I would like to subscribe to DIALOGUE but I was robbed last month and my disability check doesn't go far. I am sixty-five, born 12 September 1918. If you'll trust me I'll make it right. Do you have a back issue which contains anything on the Word of Wisdom, Sonia Johnson and the ERA, or any other back issues? I am convinced DIALOGUE is the greatest thing that has happened to Church since Joseph Smith and brethren published the Book of Mormon and I pray to God we shall shortly prove it.

Woodrow Clark
Price, Utah

Refining the Definitions

I think Poll is basically correct when he states the fundamental difference between Iron Rods and Liahonas to be their "responses to religious authoritarianism" (Summer 1982, p. 72). Iron Rods obey; Liahonas question.

Expressed less negatively (from the Liahona viewpoint) the distinction is one of "personal responsibility" for the use of one's free will.

Liahonas acquiesce in authoritative pronouncements only if they independently feel the pronouncement to be true. Iron Rods acquiesce even without independent evaluation thereof.

Liahonas reserve to themselves all personal decision making, accepting responsibility (good or bad) for each decision. Iron Rods avoid individual decision making by patterned obedience to all authoritative pronouncements. They hope to eschew individual responsibility by being "hundred percenters" — always obedient even at the cost of understanding.

In a nutshell the difference is one of a critical *vs.* a faithful frame of mind. Liahonas analyze and criticize; Iron Rods analyze but do not criticize.

Criticism (of policies, programs, persons, conduct) is "evil-speaking of the Lord's anointed" when Liahonas do it of those in authority. When Iron Rods do it, it's called priesthood correlation.

Gerry L. Ensley
Los Alamitos, California

Semi-Sainthood

Please find enclosed a cheque to cover my subscription to *DIALOGUE*. Many thanks for a remarkable journal I find frank, refreshing, and informative. I felt very near the thoughts of Jan Shipps (Spring 1982) being myself a non-Mormon but very much Mormon sympathizer. (Indeed, there must exist somewhere a special claim of semi-sainthood for people like us!) I have studied Mormonism for the past twelve to

eighteen years and I particularly enjoy the historical aspects and development of the Church. I leave all theological questions to those who understand them.

I apply to my life some (even many) Mormon health principles: I eat simply, I drink no coffee or tea. At home, though, I drink my wine or beer or even (oh, horror!!) a wee bit of whiskey.

I do not join the church, as I feel that I shall lose all magic and beauty of Mormonism if I did so. So, I stay as I am. I enjoy meeting Mormons, especially all those bright-eyed and eager missionaries who are so much surprised to find that I know so much about Mormonism, and they cannot possibly understand me when I say that I do not join the Church because I love it so much. I wish them well, nevertheless.

Stathis Papstathopoulos
Bruxelles, Belgium

The DIALOGUE Tradition

Accept my hearty congratulations for the way you are continuing the *DIALOGUE* tradition.

DIALOGUE has made a significant contribution through the years to the Church by serving as an outlet for historical and doctrinal insights which might not have had as much circulation otherwise. I know many of us are deeply appreciative of the careful research and sensitive perspectives which, for the most part, have appeared over the years in *DIALOGUE*. Such insights have deepened my own gratitude for membership in the Church, strengthened my resolve to learn and grow in the gospel, broadened my understanding and empathy for others, historical and contemporary, who have and are struggling with self and service, and opened new and exciting vistas of exploration and testimony in seeing myself reflected in the lives and challenges of other figures then and now.

Exposure to the sensitivity and perspective of many others helps us to under-

stand other's viewpoints, and while exposing the reality of disunity and apparent conflict in approach and ideas, I believe we are brought to a more mature realization of our own peccadillos and consequently closer to a real unity of the faith. Keep us in *DIALOGUE*.

Roger S. Porter
Pocatello, Idaho

Unconcerned Agnostics

Richard D. Poll quoted President Harold B. Lee to say that "a liberal in the Church is merely one that does not have a testimony." Was Increase Mather wrong when he said, "Ignorance is the mother, not of devotion, but of heresy"?

Doubting professors are not so threatening to our Church as unbelieving iron-rod authoritarians, obsessed with administration and position. It is this type that is the real enemy of the doubting professors, not Joseph Fielding Smith and Bruce R. McConkie.

By contrast, the agnostic authoritarian isn't very interested in what we might loosely call "gospel questions." Nevertheless his/her conventionality is easily mistaken for virtue. For insulation against the doubting professors he/she packs around his/her anti-intellectual pseudo-scholars who, like himself/herself (to borrow from Shaw) are more opinionated than educated.

The doubting professors, who search for the truth, and the true believers, who know it, should drive the unconcerned agnostics out of the temple with whips. Otherwise the drift of our Church toward historical obscurity will continue.

Joseph H. Jepson
Woodside, California

Powerful But Painful Story

Where but in *DIALOGUE* magazine could one find a powerful but painful story

like "The Renovation of Marsha Fletcher?" (Michael Fillerup, Summer 1983)

Everything to do with the traditional woman's role was exposed from brain-washing, marriage, mothering, patriarchy, priesthood, philandering, physical deterioration, to aloneness. The whole bloody mess was there!

Perhaps it was best summed up with one of the protagonist's statements: "If the body was indeed a temple, then women — Mormon women especially—had permitted desecration."

I wondered, as did others, how Fillerup had such keen insights about women as well as the social behavior patterns of men. He must have excellent feminine and masculine perceptions in order to provoke writings of that caliber.

I found myself going back to the story more than once.

Loneta Murphy
Provo, Utah

Cover Pleasures

What more could I ask for? As usual the Summer issue of *DIALOGUE* has provided me with much good reading but to find as much pleasure in just looking at the outer cover is a bit unreal. Would you please send me a list of Jenni Christensen's prints.

Keep up the great work! You are partially responsible for my genuine activity at church.

Susan K. Randall
Martinez, California

Note on Anointing

Hurray again for David John Buerger! His "second anointing" article (Spring 1983) was exceptionally forthright and well-covered. He intelligently handled the deep doctrinal questions in a way that does not arouse fear of inquiry. Thanks to him and to you for printing it.

One fascinating area just touched upon in the piece was the anointing of the husband by the wife. Most Mormons have never read the entry in Heber C. Kimball's "Strange Events" notation in his journal. I include them here for those who might like to pursue the matter a little deeper:

"June 1842 I was anointed into the ancient order was washed and anointed and sealed and ordained a Preast and soforth in company with nine others, viz. Joseph Smith Hiram Smith, Wm. Law Wm. Marks Judge Adams, Brigham Young Willard Richards George Miller, N. K. Whitney.

"January 1844 my wife Vilate and my female was received in to the Holy order, and was washed and anointed by Emma

"February the first 1844 I, Heber C. Kimball received the washing of my feet, and was anointed by my wife Vilate for my burial, that is my feet head stomach, Even as Mary did Jesus, that she might have a claim on him in the Resurrection in the City of Nauvoo

"In 1845 I received the washing of my feet by I Vilate Kimball do hereby certify

that on the first day of April 1844 I attended to washing and anointing the head stomach and feet of my dear companion Heber C Kimball, that I may have claim upon him in the morning of the first Resurrection. Vilate Kimball"

The doctrinal implications of this entry are important:

1. Jesus Christ was married. (John 2)
2. He was married polygamously (Inferred from John 12)
3. Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, was one of his wives and anointed Jesus with ointment for his burial. (John 12: 2-8)
4. Because of this anointing Mary would have claim upon Jesus in the resurrection. (John 12:7)
5. Jesus appeared unto this wife, Mary, before anyone else when rising from the tomb.

For modern Mormons, many of whom are new members of five or ten years tenure, these must appear as "Strange Events" indeed.

Merle H. Graffam
Palm Desert, California