

LETTERS

Round Two on Biblical Criticism

Faulconer's critique (Letters, Winter 1983) of my article "LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible" (Spring 1982) is welcome. However, possibly because of the technical nature of my presentation, Faulconer seems to have misunderstood my argument, thus needlessly polarizing the discussion.

For example, I used the relative degree to which each of my four groups employed harmonization as a touchstone for identifying fundamentalist presuppositions. Faulconer questions the utility and accuracy of this touchstone. I defined *harmonize* in the glossary at the end of the article as "the 'ironing out' of apparent contradictions in authoritative sources considered to be more or less inerrant" (p. 117). "Harmonizing" thus did not include general theological commitment to the idea of an underlying unity or harmony of the scriptures, as Faulconer suggests. Rather, I looked for practical manifestations such as the forcible "correction" and accommodation of texts, either through ignoring specific disharmonies or through impatiently imposed interpretation or textual emendation on dogmatic grounds.

Of course, I agree that a commitment to the revealed character of scripture necessarily implies some commitment to their overall unity and underlying harmony and that this commitment can take various forms, "from the naive to the dense and difficult" (Faulconer, p. 5). Such a commitment, however, does not necessarily require manipulating words, propositions, or external forms, unless one has made the presuppositions of fundamentalism discussed in my article.

Faulconer thus misreads my appeal to reject harmonizing as a rejection of the re-

vealed character of scripture, and accuses me of aping one or two authors of my fourth group who in his opinion have emptied their faith of all its particular content and have lost religion altogether. But in calling for a rejection of harmonization and fundamentalism (as I defined them), I by no means called for a modernist rejection of revelation, nor intended to endorse all the particular stances of the different authors in Group IV, as varied as these are known to be. My discussion of LDS beliefs about restoration (pp. 113-15) speaks as much against modernism as against fundamentalism. I agree with Faulconer that modernism tends to reduce religion to ethics and philosophy, but I was not arguing that point. I was focusing on an ideological problem that I see as more immediately threatening to our community—the fact that fundamentalism tends to reduce religion to dogma and apologetics. Both extremes ought to be shunned.

Faulconer's remarks about hermeneutics are misguided. I am well aware of the literature and do not agree that it supports his ideas any more than it supports mine—unless, of course, one believes that the literature has demonstrated conclusively that a text contains only such meaning as its readers can impute. Although some authors do so believe, others have preferred to see a dialectic between the horizon of the text in its original setting and the horizon of the text as perceived by the reader (Gadamer), or a hermeneutic circle in which the reader goes to the text with presuppositions, that in turn must be questioned and undermined by the text itself (Moltmann). Faulconer's insistence upon the revealedness of the scriptural text (in my view accurate) is simply incompatible

with his denying the text any meaning other than that given it by the reader. In such a denial, revelation itself becomes something merely attributed to a text by its readers, without any connection to an act of God in the production of the text.

Unfortunately, the solipsistic and nihilistic tendencies in Faulconer's position — if this is indeed what he intended — have also apparently caused misreadings of the literature he cites in his critique. My complaint with Barlow was *not* that he simply believed that an LDS exegesis should reflect LDS faith presuppositions in the same way that Raymond Brown's or Edward Schillebeeckx's reflects theirs. Neither Brown nor Schillebeeckx makes exegetical decisions on the basis of Roman Catholic dogma. Rather, their faith influences their commentary on a much more subtle and intrinsic level — what they believe the text *means* as opposed to what it *meant*. Some of their fundamentalist co-religionists consequently accuse them of modernism. Barlow was not proposing a subtle and intrinsic influence of LDS faith upon LDS exegesis. He was proposing that LDS claims about the historical meaning of the Old Testament when it was written and during its history of interpretation, ought to be based in the extrinsic and propositionally formulated orthodoxy of current Latter-day Saintism, regardless of what the texts in their original languages actually say and how these sayings relate to their ancient near-Eastern context. But because I took exception with this idea, Faulconer mistakenly assumed that I believe that LDS faith should have no influence on our scripture study, ignoring the end of my paragraph on Barlow, where I indeed suggested on what level I thought our LDS faith should affect our exegesis. It is unfortunate that Faulconer has also misconstrued Brown in the process, whose *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist, 1981) discussed many of the same issues my article addressed.

Faulconer also misunderstood the specific points that I saw as valuable in the

"New Mormon History." Some kind of chimerical objectivity or freedom from presuppositions in general were not among them. Martin Marty, addressing the Mormon History Association in Omaha, called for a recognition of the limitations of the critical method, not for its abandonment, nor for its being subsumed into a denominationally oriented scholasticism. The "second level naivete" described by Ricoeur and supported by Marty is not at all the same thing as the "primitive naivete" of the fundamentalist tendencies Faulconer defends. (See Martin E. Marty, "Two Integritys: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 3–19.)

Faulconer further made several minor objections to my choice of diction or my use of a typology. He is quite correct for I prefaced the article with serious precautions about typologies. However, his protest about my typology's "artificiality" misunderstands the purpose and limitations of typological analysis in general and ignores my own stated reservations. His claim that I was unfair to Group I by describing its strengths in language "calculated to show them as weaknesses" overlooks the fact that one can see the theoretical strength of a position while not sharing it or desiring to partake of its peculiar idiom. His claim that I glossed over Group IV's general lack of ready adaptability to popular religious needs and usages appears simply to complain that I did not polemicize on the subject as he does in his critique, since I did, in fact, mention the problem and suggested ways in which this weakness might be overcome. His claim that I overlooked the differences between devotional and scholarly exegesis again disregards my stated reservation that many authors in the typology "do not write exegesis or scriptural commentary *per se*, but use scriptures in a theological or apologetic endeavor" (p. 100). His complaint that I noted Group II's "lack of credibility" as a weakness, but did not note a similar weakness in Group IV similarly overlooks the fact that I de-

scribed this weakness of Group IV in much more pointed terms as an "implied charge of heresy" (p. 108).

Faulconer may have a point when he criticizes my inclusion of Group III's failure to produce commentaries as a weakness, since, as he suggests, the problem may be hesitant publishers—not the group's stance. On the other hand, publishers may be aware that fundamentalist audiences would not like the critical leanings of Group III books while critical audiences would not care for their occasional waffling on sensitive issues. Faulconer's final minor objection complains that I was less hard on Group IV's linguistic weaknesses than upon those of Group I. His characterization here is simply inaccurate. Group III is the strongest in this regard; Group I is the weakest. Group IV's relative linguistic weakness is not necessarily connected to its overall approach to biblical interpretation. This is not the case with Groups I and II, since generally the more competence is gained in languages and critical philosophical method, the more various accommodations are made in hermeneutical stance, that are characteristic of the less fundamentalistic side of the spectrum. I agree fully with Faulconer that a critic should be philologically competent to evaluate the claims made by others. However, various members of *all* four groups ought probably improve their skills.

In short, Faulconer's critique has misread my article and has misapplied the pertinent literature on hermeneutics. It has misunderstood how the faith of competent biblical scholars of other denominations affects their exegesis.

Anthony A. Hutchinson
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Agnostic Irresolution

I was disappointed with Sterling McMurrin's interview (Spring 1984). Notwithstanding his being a "leading philosopher and educator" within the Church, his discussion lacks a premise vital to any the-

ological topic: he neither affirms nor denies God's existence. Because of that agnostic irresolution, the entire interview fails to persuade the reader to believe any of his "heresies," whether they concern Church history or "Mormon orthodoxy."

Since Joseph Smith's "Lectures on Faith," the Church has taught that faith in God is the "foundation of all righteousness." In spite of that teaching, McMurrin asserts that the Church causes its members to "tie their own religious faith to its own controlled interpretations of its history" (p. 20). However, he later admits that "The Church hasn't settled on a single treatment of history but has been involved with several approaches" (p. 21). I find it difficult to believe that a church could indoctrinate its people with a historical dogma if it has not yet established a definitive version of that dogma. I also find no evidence in McMurrin's discussion or my own experience to cause me to believe that my faith hinges on a purely historical framework. The Church taught me that faith centers on God and Christ, and I developed that faith "by study" as well as prayer. Knowing that God exists, I rely on him to teach me theology. Inasmuch as that theology includes a study of his dealings with humankind, I investigate those histories to learn about God. However, I find that such a study "will increase unto more ungodliness" if improperly motivated. Both scholars and saints learn history, not only to gain social identity, but more importantly, to learn its archetypal truths. A pursuit of history that despairs of discovering those truths would be relatively insignificant. Were there hope of reviving Shakespeare from the grave for a few minutes of conversation, I'm sure that most scholars would exploit the opportunity. How ironic that a philosopher would not satisfy his soul by discovering God's existence before discoursing on his nature! McMurrin reminds us that "religious faith should be faith in God and in one's fellowmen," but his arguments display no such confidence, either in God's ability to guide

His followers or in the "leaders'" ability (and desire) to seek that guidance (p. 20).

Another example of McMurrin's ambivalence occurs on pages 20 and 38 of the spring issue. At first, McMurrin agrees with the interviewer's assertion that we have "much to fear from history." Later, however, he cites B. H. Roberts's saying that "to write exact history and yet not destroy faith it is necessary 'to frankly state events as they occurred . . .'" (p. 38). If an honest recounting of our history will not "destroy faith," what have we to fear? The Church justly concerns itself that its members learn the basic events of its history. A member of the Church discovers deity's nature through the fundamental Mormon historical events, and, as the proverb says, "familiarity breeds contempt," or confidence. The same is not true, however, of the history of human imperfection in the Church. But "faith" can only seem to be unsubstantiated fanaticism to an agnostic. McMurrin needs to reconcile his statements about centering faith in God with his negation of Christ's divinity and his uncertainties concerning God's existence. Any of those whom Church history has inspired to discover God for themselves are more competent theologians than Brother McMurrin, for they know that God exists. I am confident that when the Church prepares itself for additional study, God will give us other histories. But until we have ascertained his existence, a philosophical discourse on his nature, workings, and servants means nothing. To thus rely on unaided intellect when studying theology is to allow the scribes, with the priests, to "drive out the prophets" and to replace religious righteousness with unripened reason.

Todd Morley
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A Group of the Like-Minded

Please accept this donation as a token of appreciation for the great enrichment *DIALOGUE* has brought to my religious life.

After several years of pondering many paradoxes and perplexities of Mormon history, including changes in doctrine and practice, I began a personal search to try to resolve these matters to my own satisfaction. However, in attempting to discuss what I felt to be vital and important issues with many Church and family members, I often found only suspicious hearts, closed minds, and a disturbing degree of ignorance regarding the magnitude of our problems.

It was finally through publications such as yours, coupled with several long talks with some other "Liahona" Mormons, that I resolved in good conscience to stay in the Church. I shall always be grateful for the stimulation and challenge, the knowledge and insight, and the overall depth of thought in the essays and writings of *DIALOGUE*. Finally, I had found people who were knowledgeable and unafraid to honestly confront difficult issues.

I do not believe my story is unique; indeed I am sure it has been experienced by thousands of people. But I wonder how many leave the Church or become inactive because they haven't been able to find anyone with whom they could really talk.

Some of us in western Washington decided, therefore, to locate other readers of such publications as *DIALOGUE* so that we could support each other and help spread their circulation to the many who could benefit from them. With this in mind, I recently asked for subscriber lists from *DIALOGUE* and *Sunstone* and invited readers in the Seattle area to form a discussion group. We have agreed upon the following statement of objectives:

1. To discuss in-depth topics that relate to the gospel, the modern Church, and to Mormon culture.

2. To provide a forum where thoughtful questions are encouraged rather than suppressed and to cultivate an atmosphere where members feel free to say what they think and feel without fear of recrimination.

3. To form new and supportive friendships among people of similar mindsets and

to greet each other as equals, regardless of ecclesiastical rank or title.

4. To share knowledge and expertise, particularly on the more troubling aspects of our religion, in the hopes that we may help one another.

5. To serve as a means of helping some reconsider who may have withdrawn from activity and belief in the Church by realizing that there are others who also struggle in some ways but who have chosen to follow a course of faith and activity for sound reasons.

6. To help spread such publications as *DIALOGUE* and *Sunstone* and to help give them the legitimacy in the Church they deserve.

7. To do all of the above through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and with the objective of building knowledge and strengthening faith.

So far our successes have been moderate but steady, and we continue to grow in numbers.

Patrick L. McKenzie
Bellevue, Washington

Von Däniken Correction

In the third paragraph of my review of Erich Von Däniken's *Strategie der Götter und Das Achte Weltwunder* (Winter 1983), is one sentence: "In previous European books dealing with pre-Columbian archeology, he briefly mentioned the Book of Mormon, but only to deny its claim as a historical record." The books in question are not Von Däniken's but those of other authors.

The sentence should read: "In previous European books dealing with pre-Columbian archeology, the Book of Mormon was only briefly mentioned, but only to deny its claim as a historical record."

Peter C. Nadig
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Service for LDS Choirs

The Foundation for Sacred Art Music was established in 1980 to publish choral music for LDS worship services drawn from the great musical literature of the past. To date, composers represented include Palestrina, Charpentier, Mozart, Schubert, and Pittoni, with texts consonant with LDS doctrine. Most of the works now available are designed for Christmas and Easter services, although individual movements are appropriate for any occasion which requires sacred music. All of the works are within the musical ability of most ward choirs. Parts for a small musical ensemble are also available for most works.

To receive a list of publications, examination copies of particular works, or to support the endeavors of the Foundation, write to Ruth Stanfield Rees, editor, The Foundation for Sacred Art Music, 10316 Cheviot Drive, Los Angeles, California 90064, (213) 202-8057.

Call for Papers Association for Mormon Letters

Candadai Seshachari, chair of the program committee for the 1985 annual symposium, invites proposals or abstracts on any topic related to Mormon letters. The deadline for proposals/abstracts is 15 September 1984. If the proposal is approved, the completed paper will be due by 5 January 1985. Send proposals/abstracts to Candadai Seshachari, 4763 Monroe Blvd., Ogden, UT 84403. The annual symposium will be held on 19 January 1985, in Salt Lake City. For membership information, write Stephen Sondrup, 1346 S. 1800 E., Salt Lake City, UT 84108.