

LETTERS

SUBMISSIONS POLICY

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Thatcher Resilenced

Edward Lyman's "The Alienation of an Apostle from his Quorum: The Moses Thatcher Case" (Summer 1985) is a selective, and in my opinion, somewhat inaccurate view of this particular episode of Church history. The author labels as "overly simplified" the generally accepted view that Thatcher's independent mind was "crushed" by the "Church hierarchy[s] arbitrary will."

Calling Thatcher "abrasive" and "stubborn," Lyman presents him as generally obnoxious (pp. 85, 89). In a different context, these same value-saturated adjectives might be interchanged with "forthright," "unwavering," and generally courageous. But Lyman apparently sees little of that in Moses Thatcher. He implies that any injustice done was not to Thatcher, but to the Twelve for suffering years of Thatcher's outbursts and insults before ejecting him from the Quorum.

Lyman quotes enough from Thatcher's colleagues in the Quorum to persuade me that some, if not all, thought Thatcher was an incessant bore. Lyman does not appear to entertain the notion that some journal entries might themselves be revisionist history and does not let Thatcher speak for himself. We again face the Mormon issue of the decade: a plastic history where the "good guys" are good (other than their "failure to communicate," as Lyman acknowledges p. 89) and the "bad guys" are bad. Unfortunately, Lyman omits significant facts that have a direct bearing upon Thatcher's alienation.

For example, he devotes his first six pages to an arduous narrative about Thatcher's dispute with George Q. Cannon over Bullion Beck stock. No doubt the dispute scarred both Cannon and Thatcher. But identification of fault is less important than perception of fault.

On 30 November 1896, Lorenzo Snow, then president of the Quorum of the

Twelve, published a letter in the *Deseret News* in response to an inquiry from five men who wondered why Thatcher had been “excommunicated” from his quorum. Writing almost seven years after the Cannon-Thatcher dispute, Snow claim that Thatcher’s belligerent behavior towards Cannon was one of several reasons why he was dropped from the quorum. Is President Snow’s claim itself revisionist history? “Half of the apostles bore various personal administrative grudges of such intensity [against Cannon] that they effectively blocked the organization of the First Presidency” from 1887 to 1889 (Quinn 1984, 30). Why then would Snow single out Thatcher from all the brethren with complaints against Cannon to claim, seven years after a resolution of Bullion Beck, that Thatcher’s dispute with Cannon evinced a “disaffection [sic] . . . dat[ing] back to a time long before political difficulties could enter into the matter”?

In Snow’s words, “Moses claimed that Brother Cannon had defrauded him, and he threatened in the presence of President Woodruff and others of the Twelve to sue him at law and thus bring many private affairs before the public through the courts.” Snow also claimed that “instead of Brother Cannon owing him [Thatcher], he was in Brother Cannon’s debt.”

Here is Thatcher’s side of the story. In a letter to President Snow, dated 12 December 1896, Thatcher wrote: “For the present, at least, there is no need to go into further details regarding the Bullion Beck matters, except to correct your assertion ‘that instead of Brother Cannon owing him, he was in Brother Cannons’ debt.’ I can think of no explanation so brief and authentic as a copy of the receipt I gave him in settlement of financial differences” (Thatcher, 12 Dec. 1896). Thatcher then quotes the receipt which acknowledges that Cannon transferred 2,368 shares of “pooled stock” (worth \$2,500 in 1889) to Thatcher and that the receipt was intended to satisfy all demands Thatcher had against Cannon (Thatcher, 12 Dec. 1896). The receipt is

dated 24 December 1889, seven years before Thatcher was dropped from his quorum.

The most glaring deficiency in Lyman’s article is its treatment of the Political Manifesto. Lyman says, quoting B. H. Roberts, that this manifesto instructed Church officials to obtain permission from Church leaders before accepting political office. Lyman does not quote the manifesto itself, and, significantly, omits a part of the manifesto which stated “in most positive and emphatic language . . . that at no time has there ever been any attempt . . . to unite in any degree the functions of the one [Church] with the other [state]” (“To the Saints,” *Deseret News Weekly*, 14 Aug. 1897, p. 533). The manifesto also asserted “it had always been understood that men holding high church positions should not accept political office without first obtaining approval.” As Thatcher well knew, the Church’s denial of involvement in state affairs was misleading at best. Amazingly, Lyman’s article also omits any mention of the *Salt Lake Times* interview of 23 June 1891 in which Presidents Wilford Woodruff and George Q. Cannon declared the Church “will not assert any right to control the political action of its members in the future[,]” and categorically denied the *Times*’ charge that “the Church claims the right to exercise absolute authority over its members in all matters including direct dictation as to whom they should vote for.” To that charge, the Presidents replied that “the Church does not claim any such right,” in effect establishing Church neutrality in politics. They further announced, “We disclaim the right to control the political action of the members.” On a separate but related issue, they vehemently denied the continued practice of polygamy. That, too, was a false statement (Quinn 1984, 59–60).

Lyman also fails to mention the subsequent and secret “Gardo House Meeting” (held some time before the 1892 election, Ivins n.d.) High Church officials there decided that only a Republican Utah

could obtain statehood, amnesty for polygamists, and the return of escheated Church property, and therefore adopted the policy that “men in high authority (in the church) who believed in republican principles should go out among the people” and campaign (Reasoner 1896; Ivins n.d.) Apostle John Henry Smith was given a roving commission to campaign for the GOP. Democrats were told to “remain silent.” Thatcher did not attend the Gardo House Meeting but was incensed that the Church would violate its pledges of neutrality (Taylor 1978, 45; Thatcher, 12 Dec. 1896).

Thatcher, B. H. Roberts, and Charles W. Penrose, all Democrats, did not remain silent in the ensuing campaign but freely expressed their political (and Democratic) views. They soon found themselves “out of harmony” with their respective quorums. Lyman gives only passing reference to Robert’s “disharmony,” but that, too, is a complex story that has a bearing on Thatchers’ alienation.

Although Truman Madsen’s biography of Roberts claims that his paramour sin was not checking with the First Presidency before running for Congress (Madsen 1980, 222), it appears that Roberts did in fact discuss the matter with a member of the presidency who said “it would be all right” and did not raise Roberts’s candidacy as an issue in a subsequent meeting with Roberts (*Salt Lake Tribune*, B. H. Roberts interview, 14 Oct. 1895, in Taylor 1978, 54).

At the October conference, 1895, President Joseph F. Smith publicly rebuked Thatcher and Roberts for accepting political nomination without Church approval. When the “Manifesto” was issued six months later, both Roberts and Thatcher refused to approve it. Thatcher said he could not sign it without personal “stultification” (Thatcher, 6 April 1896).

Lyman’s claim that Thatcher suffered no unfair treatment because of his stand on the Political Manifesto is improbable. According to Thatcher, he had not been told in April 1896 that his name would not

be withheld for a sustaining vote. Lyman correctly notes that Thatcher was gravely ill in April 1896 and had seen the manifesto only two hours before the conference. He suggests that the brethren did not discuss the manifesto with Thatcher out of concern for his ill health. Be that as it may, the brethren had labored with Roberts over several months *on two separate occasions*—once when Roberts refused to acknowledge that he had done wrong in campaigning for the Democrats, and again when he refused to sign the manifesto. Roberts repented on both occasions, but Thatcher remained unrepentant the second time.

Notwithstanding their public complaints against Thatcher, President Woodruff publicly prayed for him six months later in October conference 1896 (Woodruff, 5 Oct. 1896) and Lorenzo Snow enjoined the members, “I want you to pray for Brother Thatcher” (Snow, 5 Oct. 1896). But Counselor Joseph F. Smith spoke against Thatcher to “guard the people from unwise sympathy,” further stating that he himself found it “impossible” to sympathize with Thatcher because he had done wrong (Smith, 5 Oct. 1896). One month later, at a Cache Valley stake conference, Smith publicly rebuked Bishop B. M. Lewis for praying that the Lord would help Thatcher see the error of his ways. According to an unidentified “prominent churchman,” Smith’s behavior “savored so strongly of a spirit contrary to divine love . . . that many who . . . considered Mr. Thatcher’s opposition wrong wondered whether after all, some strong personal feeling did not underlie the pressure brought to bear on [Thatcher] . . .” (*Salt Lake Tribune* 21 Nov. 1896).

Lyman’s article omits all these events. Lyman also suggests “[p]ublic reaction to Thatcher’s dismissal was clearly mixed” (p. 88). Yet he does not discuss the negative reception the manifesto received in some wards and stakes. Three members of the Cache Stake High Council refused to approve the manifesto. At the Tooele

Stake Conference, three men voted against the manifesto. Visiting Apostle Frank M. Lyman, in the afternoon session, declared the manifesto a revelation from God and asked the congregation to suspend high councilman Elder J. D. De La Mare apparently for voting against the manifesto. Between twenty and twenty-five voted to suspend De La Mare; about eight to ten voted against suspension, and about three hundred refused to vote, suggesting that the vast majority were deeply disturbed about the matter (Ivins n.d.).

Finally, Lyman's article challenges Thatcher's insistence on the separation of church and state by quoting an 1888 letter suggesting that Thatcher acquiesced to Church influence in politics (p. 73). I do not question the authenticity of that letter or that Thatcher said what he meant at the time. Yet certainly more relevant are the many occasions Thatcher preached publicly the separation of church and state. He was influential in securing the passage of Article I, Section 4 of the 1896 Utah Constitution which still says in pertinent part: "There shall be no union of church and state, nor shall any church dominate the state or interfere with its functions." Lyman's neglect of these contributions to Utah society presents a slanted view of Thatcher's beliefs.

One of Thatcher's public letters in response to a public attack from Apostles Joseph F. Smith and John Henry Smith perhaps best typifies Thatcher's view of Church involvement in politics. Said Thatcher, "If I believed politically and felt politically as do my Republican friends, Joseph F. and John Henry, I should no doubt write as they have written; but as I do not politically so believe and feel, I refrain from imitating their style. I fully recognize, however, their right to criticize anything that I may politically say or do; but I do not accord them higher right in that respect than that accorded to the humblest Republican in the rank and file of the party" (*Salt Lake Herald*, 25 May 1892). Thatcher's egalitarian attitude,

while in harmony with the First Presidency's statement in the *Times*, is inconsistent with action taken at the Gardo House Meeting and the Political Manifesto.

If Thatcher was indeed "abrasive," as Lyman claims, or "rebellious and worldly minded" as President Snow said, the correspondence between Thatcher and Snow does not show it. The final paragraph of the final letter from Thatcher to Snow reveals the inner turmoil of a man trying to walk a tightrope between devotion to church and devotion to conscience. He wrote, "In conclusion, I desire to say that I do not complain of the treatment accorded me, nor do I murmur of the humiliation to which I have been subjected. But I cannot think the threatened excommunication from the Church, as intimated in some quarters, can be seriously entertained. Am I to be driven out of the church because of the Manifesto? I shall try and live the religion of our Savior. I want to live and die among my brethren and friends. I desire to do my duty to my church. I wish my children to observe the principles of the gospel, that they, too, may desire to live, die and be buried by the side of their father, when they shall reach, on the hillside, the final place of peace and rest" (Thatcher, 12 Dec. 1896).

On 14 November 1896 President Lorenzo Snow informed Thatcher that he had been "depriv[ed] of [his] Apostleship and other offices in the priesthood" (Snow, 14 Nov. 1896). On 30 July 1897, Thatcher's stake high council formally charged him with "apostasy and unchristianlike conduct . . ." (Taylor 1978, 62). Finding him guilty as charged, the council demanded that Thatcher confess "he was mistaken in conveying the idea that the church authorities desired and intended to unite church and state or to exercise undue influence in political affairs" (Taylor 1978, 62). Thatcher endorsed the council's decision "without qualifications or mental reservations" (Taylor 1978, 62).

Moses Thatcher died on 21 August 1909. On 23 August, the *Deseret News*

published an obituary claiming that Moses Thatcher "lived to acknowledge the justice of the action of his brethren of the Twelve." This statement brought a sharp rebuke from Moses Thatcher, Jr., whose letter to the editor was published in the *News* on 2 September 1909: "There is a wide difference between accepting the decision of that council, and even fulfilling its every requirement, and acknowledging the justice of the decision or the justice of the action of his brethren in the twelve in making the complaint. So far as I understand my father's position, or so far as his family and near friends understand it, he accepted the decision of the high council and complied with its requirements because it was the only thing he could do and retain his membership in the church, and to lose his standing in the church for him was not to be thought of. But the truth of the statement 'he lived to acknowledge the justice of the action of his brethren of the Twelve,' should be denied, for no such acknowledgement was ever made so far as I know or can find out."

It seems unfair that Lyman would accept the hearsay of John Henry Smith reporting that Thatcher, Jr., conceded his father was "insane" 26 July 1896 because of morphine addiction, yet omit mention of Thatcher, Jr.'s assessment of his father's character in 1909. Furthermore, Thatcher's writings, especially on the subject of his own "alienation," are not the ramblings of an insane man.

It is disappointing that Lyman did not think that Thatcher's own assessment and descriptions of the situation were relevant to understanding the man and the problems he faced.

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Book of Mormon Peoples

With reference to "Indians Not Lamanites?" by George D. Smith (Summer 1985, p. 5) "Sorenson, an anthropologist at Brigham Young University, argues for abandoning the long-held doctrine that substantially all North and South American Indians are descended from the 'Lamanites' of the Book of Mormon."

Though some have held such views it should be recalled that President Anthony W. Ivins said, "It [the Book of Mormon] does not tell us that no one was here before them [the Book of Mormon people]. It does not tell us that people did not come after" (*Conference Reports*, April 1929, pp. 15-16).

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Smith's "Naivete"

I question the accuracy of several of George D. Smith's assertions (Summer 1985, pp. 5-6).

Smith claims that the "limited region" approach to the Book of Mormon geography contradicts the Nephite record itself. To prove this, Smith cites Ether 2:5 and Helaman 11:20. In doing so he reveals a surprising naivete about the overall internal geographical picture presented in the Book of Mormon.

Even a casual reading of Ether 2 will make it plain that verse 5 refers to an area in the Old World, not the New. Helaman 11:20 simply means that the Lamanites began to inhabit "the whole face" of the land upon which the Book of Mormon history took place. (See Helaman 11:6, where the term "the whole earth" obviously refers only to the land area of the Nephites and the Lamanites. Parallels to this sort of geographical description can also be found in the Bible.) No informed student of the Book of Mormon's internal geography would claim that Helaman 11:20 is referring to a gigantic land area (such as all of North and/or South America), as Smith wrongly assumes.

In addition, Smith asserts that the "limited region" approach also contradicts certain statements about American Indians made by Joseph Smith and some of his associates. There is no officially canonized doctrine of the Church that *all* of the American Indians are *blood* descendants of Abraham, or Lehi, or Mormon, etc. It just doesn't exist.

Furthermore, during the Nauvoo period Joseph Smith made several comments about possible locations for certain Book of Mormon lands and cities which restrict the book's land area to Mesoamerica. (These are summarized in Verneil Simmons, *Peoples, Places and Prophecies: A Study of the Book of Mormon* [Independence, Missouri: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1977], pp. 109–21.)

But most importantly, what we must concentrate on is what the Book of Mormon itself says about the size of the region upon which its history occurred. And the book makes it abundantly clear that its land area was a relatively limited one, whose dimensions and topography, interestingly enough, match those of Mesoamerica.

Smith's claim that the Book of Mormon "describes a civilization which is inappropriate for the New World" does not hold up in the face of the research done by such responsible scholars as John Sorenson, V. Garth Norman, David Palmer,

M. Wells Jakeman, Kirk Holland Vestal, Bruce Warren, Kirk Magleby, and others. Furthermore, Norman will soon publish some important studies further substantiating ancient transoceanic crossings from the Old World to the Mesoamerican region.

Smith makes much of the current lack of conclusive evidence for the Book of Mormon's references to cows, pigs, and horses. There is a small amount of evidence for the existence of "cows" and "horses" in Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times. (Milton R. Hunter, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1956], pp. 1–10; Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1985] pp. 294–95.) What is needed here is perspective. First, negative evidence does not prove that cows and horses did not exist, only that their remains have not been discovered. Second, since only about 2 percent of the Mesoamerican ruins which date to the Book of Mormon period have been fully excavated, all the evidence is by no means in yet. (Kirk Holland Vestal and Arthur Wallace, *The Firm Foundation of Mormonism* [Los Angeles: LL Co., 1981], p. 103.) Third, despite all of the archaeological work done in biblical regions, there are still items mentioned in the Bible (such as lions) which have not yet been discovered. Fourth, the length of time it took archaeology to verify the Bible's statements about camels should caution us against relying too heavily on negative evidence. Fifth, since the names for the same animals can differ from culture to culture, we might be dealing with a linguistic problem, not an archaeological one. For an excellent discussion of animals in the Book of Mormon, see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, pp. 288–99.

I believe it is fair to ask Smith to deal with Sorenson's evidences for the Book of Mormon's statements about writing, metallurgy, population, cement, highways, fortified cities, and warfare as discussed in the article he critiqued, "Digging Into The

Book of Mormon" (*Ensign*, Sept.–Oct. 1984). Another fair topic would be the growing body of evidence for ancient trans-oceanic crossings from the Near East to Mesoamerica.

Since Sorenson treats the criticized topics and many others in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, it might be a better subject for someone seriously intent on challenging Sorenson's demonstration that the Book of Mormon's geography is consistent with Mesoamerica's geography and that the Nephite record has all of the characteristics of an ancient Mesoamerican codex.

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Unselfish Chapter

I appreciated Neil Birch's recounting the origins of the Indian Student Placement Program (Winter 1985). Not much has been written about that unselfish chapter in Mormon history.

The program has always taxed people's ability to adjust and to give. Rearing foster children in addition to one's own is made doubly difficult by major cultural differences. The mostly comfortable middle-class Mormons who have served as foster parents needed extraordinary commitment, patience, and wisdom. The Indian child thrust into an alien environment, with its different expectations, often faced great frustrations. And the Indian family, parting with a child, suffered a wrenching experience. With the best intentions on all sides, the arrangements sometimes simply broke down. But a great number of success stories played out, too—marvelous examples of achievement and unselfishness, when children and families could make the necessary adjustments.

So far as I know, the only effort to tell what the program is like is Kay Cox's wonderful little book, *Without Reservation* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980], now unfortunately out of print. I have reread it several times, always with the same warm feeling.

During the past twenty years, she and her husband, Nyle, have taken in sixteen foster children, some for only short periods and others for years. Their efforts truly spanned a generation when their first foster child brought his son to live with them.

Only people who are both idealistic and durable could make the program succeed. Kay Cox demonstrates that wry good humor is a third valuable ingredient. One of my favorite incidents in the book occurred when a teen-age foster son insisted on dipping snuff. Kay told him that the next time she found a snuff can under his pillow she would lace it with what it looked like—manure. A day or two later she told him she had kept her word. He rushed off to brush his teeth. Returning, he said incredulously, "You didn't really do that? You're just trying to scare me." She said, "I did, and furthermore, if you can't tell the difference, for goodness sakes, don't buy it—sell it! We have a corral full and you are just welcome to all you want for yourself or any of your friends!" (p. 114)

Some Indian readers have been offended by the portrayal of Indian children as having problems; some social workers in the placement program have been offended at references to mistakes by well-intentioned foster parents and program administrators. But the book is lovingly full, too, of those small successes that add up to victory.

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