Peterson's Bias

After reading Levi Peterson's article "Juanita Brooks, My Subject, My Sister" (Spring 1989), I would like to comment on what I consider to be the author's bias. I speak with appreciation for Peterson as Juanita's biographer (see *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* [University of Utah Press, 1988]) and offer the perspective of a member of the extended Leavitt family, though I do not pretend to speak for the family.

First, I don't believe the word "dissenter," used by Peterson (p. 22), accurately describes Juanita. Dissent means to differ in sentiment, to disagree, but also to reject the doctrines or authority of an established church, to withdraw from the group. While she did differ with many General Authorities about her historical treatment of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, she did not reject the Church's authority or authenticity. She valued her membership. Even the term "dissident" is much too strong to describe Juanita Brooks, or Levi Peterson for that matter. A better name? Maverick. Renegade. Likewise, her dissent would be better termed as disagreement or struggle.

In his article, Peterson writes of Juanita's "extraordinary disillusionment" (p. 21) at the death of her husband Ernest. I think Peterson misinterpreted her struggle, in both the autobiography and the article. He felt her faith was shaken and her continued loyalty to the Church resulted from a combination of habit, superstition, social necessity, family pride, and intuition. I doubt that is how Juanita reacted to that difficult experience when the priesthood proved ineffectual. What I believe came out of this poignant episode (where many in the family reported that she believed until the shovels of dirt hit the casket that Ernest would be raised from the dead) was new realism toward her faith. She didn't give up on the foundation of faith, prayer, and spiritual manifestations, but neither did she follow priesthood leaders off any cliffs. Her testimony was trimmed, then strengthened. This enabled her to live an apparent paradox of faith and maverick disagreement. As my late uncle Frank McKean (no relation to her) said of Juanita, "Her strength was that she was not bothered that people made mistakes, and church leaders were people, after all." Forgiving leaders for their mistakes also allowed her to stand up against errors of the present. But she did not believe that those errors disarmed the Church of its redeeming power. Her actions showed others how to disagree without being an apostate or dissenter.

Another area where I differ with Peterson is the Delbert Stapley story. I agree with the facts but not with Peterson's interpretation. Juanita did indeed stand up to the apostle over the publication of John D. Lee's reinstatement; but when she said, "In this matter I know the will of the Lord as well as you do," I believe she was neither belittling Stapley nor boasting of her dissent. Rather she was affirming her intuition, her faith that she really did know his will. As much as I like the story, I hope that Church members don't think telling off an apostle will earn them extraordinary status. Following conscience will.

Finally, I hope Peterson wasn't using Juanita's life to justify his own "dissent" (p. 23). His DIALOGUE essay made me wonder if he wasn't putting Juanita Brooks into a place reserved for Levi Peterson. Or painting her with a marginal convic-

tion like the characters in his book *Canyons of Grace*. The parallels Peterson drew between Juanita's life and his own seemed excessive and contrived. I am glad he thinks of her as a sister, just as I do. But sisters may encourage and agree with their brothers without endorsing their behavior. I find it fascinating the way we package people—Peterson with Juanita, she with John D. Lee, and so on. It may be gratifying to the biographer, but is it fair to the subject? I would like to hear other views of her motives and contributions.

Again, I thank Peterson for his biography. Seeing her through his eyes has expanded my opinion of her and of my family.

Alan Mitchell
Madras, Oregon

The Oakland Ninth Branch

I would like to add a few notes to Jesse L. Embry's interesting article, "Separate But Equal?: Black Branches, Genesis Groups, or Integrated Wards?" (Spring 1990). In early 1986, the California Oakland Mission sponsored Virginia Street Services (VSS) for investigators and newly baptized members. These services were first held in the Virginia Avenue Chapel, which by the way, was not "the first LDS Chapel in Oakland" (p. 27), as Embry stated, but rather the oldest chapel in Oakland then owned by the Church.

In late summer 1986, I was called as a liaison officer and began to attend the services, which had by then moved to the Oakland First Ward Relief Society room. Full-time missionary elders conducted the meetings, which were attended mostly by black members and investigators.

At first I merely observed the meetings. Within a few weeks, however, Bishop Palfreyman of the First Ward asked me to organize a presidency for the VSS group and to begin superseding the elders. The idea was to place VSS under the jurisdiction of the Oakland First Ward. This move had the blessing of the mission president, Wayne Peterson, and the stake president, J. David Billeter.

I nominated as assistants Rodney Carey, Edmund Griffin, and Michael Hayes, virtually the only active male members of VSS. Elder Carey was a returned missionary; the others were newly baptized. Bishop Palfreyman called and sustained us as group leaders at a VSS sacrament meeting at which he presided. At first we met with the missionary elders in weekly presidency meetings. But, as we assumed responsibility for VSS, the elders resumed their usual duties of teaching investigators, fellowshipping new members, and transporting investigators and members to meetings in two mission-owned twelve-passenger vans.

During this same period and before, stake and ward leaders had been struggling to determine a way to divide the ward. Shortly after I became VSS group leader, the bishop and stake president asked me to recommend a geographical division of the ward that could include VSS. I recommended a division along Interstate 580, which would leave a new branch with a healthy portion of ward members and would reduce the ward to manageable size. The proposal was adopted with only one minor change.

In October 1986, I was called as president of the new Oakland Ninth Branch which combined ward members living within branch boundaries with VSS members, who, for the most part, lived within the same boundaries. The former ward members were of mixed ethnic background but were mostly Caucasian.

I chose as my counselors Jerry Young, a long-time Oakland resident, Eric Luke, lately from BYU, and as executive secretary, Edmund Griffin. The First Ward was divided in late October 1986. (Sister Embry mistakenly places this event in 1988.) The branch held its first sacrament meeting in the newly renovated Virginia Avenue Chapel on 9 November 1986. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, in the area visiting the Oakland Stake's branches, spoke. What began as a missionary program to

extend the blessings of the gospel to an area of Oakland underrepresented in the First Ward, became in only a few months a geographical unit of the Church.

I am one of only three imported branch leaders, and the only branch president from Piedmont, contrary to what Embry says (p. 28). Richard Alder, a First Ward member, is now branch president. One of his counselors lives in the branch; the other does not. Otherwise, the branch has been staffed with its own members, a great blessing to many of them. Those with little Church experience have accepted callings and have enjoyed the blessings usually associated with such sacrifices. Their growth has been the most successful aspect of the Oakland Ninth Branch.

Robert T. Baer
Piedmont, California

Freedom in the Midwest

I used to envy my Mormon MHA friends who live in Utah, but after reading Phyllis Barber's "The Mormon Woman as Writer" in the recent Women's Issue (Fall 1990), my envy has turned to relief. What a cross it must be to have so many Mormons breathing down your neck. Everywhere there are constant reinforcements to conform. Your family, neighbors, friends, clerks, teachers, police, doctors, lawyers, and others are there as vigilant reminders of what Mormons should be doing to "live the gospel." Good grief, what a dilemma for a writer. It's enough to make one paranoid.

I live in the Midwest, where credibility in the community means more than showing up in church. In Utah, you have to be a Mormon first, and everything else second. Here, I am a writer first. I can have my characters be more human, if not downright sinful. My Utah-born and raised husband has not once said: "You can't write that, what will the Church members think?" Fortunately, I had learned to think for myself before I joined the Church.

The Women's Issue was refreshing, and I enjoyed reading about modern women coping with real issues. Sometimes I get a little tired reading yet another dull article on Joseph Smith and the early Church. But then, what can you expect from someone whose favorite Mormon male fiction writer is Levi Peterson?

Violet Kimball
Edwardsville, Illinois

What Is the Sound of One Tree Clapping?

I enjoyed reading Miriam B. Murphy's review of *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poets* (Fall 1990) and was flattered that among so many poems, she commented on my contributions to the volume. My only quarrel with her observations has to do with her suggesting that the lines "and at once all the trees of the field/clap their hands and rejoice," from my poem "Gilead," "unhappily recall the muse of Joyce Kilmer" (p. 202). I assume she says this because Kilmer and I both wrote about trees expressing human emotions; but the problem with Kilmer's "Trees" is not that he uses the pathetic fallacy (investing natural objects with human emotions), but that his use of it is overly sentimental and inconsistent. Kilmer has his tree's mouth "prest/against the earth's sweet flowering breast" in one stanza, its eyes looking "at God all day" as it "lifts its leafy arms to pray" in a second, its hair holding a robin's nest in a third, and then that hair apparently being turned into a bosom holding snow in a fourth.

While Ruskin deplored the use of the pathetic fallacy (a term he invented) among the Romantics and believed their use of it marked them as poets of the second order, poets in all ages, from Homer to Seamus Heaney, have used the device, some with brilliant effectiveness. My use of it was intentional. Because so many of the allusions to trees in the poem are scriptural, I wanted to conclude the poem with a final scriptural image ("The moun-

tains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12) because I was looking for an image that would unify the other images of trees in the poem and also connect them with Christ, who as the light of the world, flames out in redemptive atonement and, through his enduring (ever green) love, is the balm (i.e., the healing ointment of the balsam or evergreen tree) in Gilead.

Robert A. Rees
Los Angeles, California

A Familiar Story

Two friends brought me Anne Castleton's article on domestic violence (Fall 1990), both convinced that her story was similar to what I endured for two decades as the wife of an LDS physician. At the age of nineteen, I married a returned missionary and medical intern. My family was Protestant, but I joined the LDS Church before my marriage. My husband nearly destroyed me over the next twenty years with mental, physical, and sexual abuse. He constantly used his interpretation of LDS doctrine against me. I did everything in my power to improve the situation, since like most women, I wanted to be a good wife and mother.

I stayed as long as I did because I honestly thought things would get better. I finally left when my youngest child was grown. During those terrible years, I often wondered why my husband's beliefs gave him the right to treat me as he did. Even in divorce counseling, I was not able to articulate the things that I had been through. Following my divorce, my husband pushed for my excommunication from the Church in an attempt to regain control. To this day, he will not admit that he abused me. The excommunication was handled with a series of certified letters, and I did not attend the trial. I am certain that ward and stake officials did not realize they were dealing with psychological and physical abuse, but rather my disobedience to my apparently righteous husband. He demanded my excommunication to punish and control, and the powers that were went along.

After my excommunication, I had to move to another area because my husband continued to harass and threaten me. The memories of events during my marriage would not fade, however, no matter how hard I tried to suppress them. I finally sought counseling again and this time was finally able to admit what had happened and begin to deal with it.

Perhaps if I had been able to read a journal such as yours, things might have ended differently. I learned about DIALOGUE years ago, but my former husband did not allow me to read anything he considered out of step with his beliefs. He told me often that there could only be one set of beliefs in our home. HIS!

I thank Anne Castleton for sharing her story. Like her, I am finding a rebirth in the academic world. I am currently a graduate student working towards a master's degree in the earth sciences.

Name withheld
San Jose, California

Amen

This is a farewell letter, mostly for those people who managed to let me know they appreciated my past letters to DIALOGUE on the subject of feminist truths and their opposites in Mormonism.

What brings on this decision? Two things: (1) This year's Women's Issue of DIALOGUE showed me my voice isn't needed in this debate, that it is in good hands. (2) Recent rejections by a variety of editors of my latest attempts to speak and write on the subject—when added to a long list of nearly twenty previously rejected writings and a similarly long list of rejected letters—convinced me that my painful efforts to communicate are fruitless. Friends keep telling me my anger, transparent in all my writings, is at fault. So be it: I am angry.

For twenty years after my conversion, I was able to keep my developing testimony in harmony with my developing intellect. In 1982, however, my testimony came crashing down when I observed LDS men and women around me being coercive, deceitful, and downright mean, all in the name of a "higher" cause: the defeat of a time-extension for the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois. Suddenly I was a stranger in my own land. But when I came to understand the theological underpinnings of that higher cause, I was horrified. I filled with anger, and it spilled out on paper.

So am I saying goodbye because I wasn't coddled and applauded by editors? Admittedly, I might be writing something totally different today if some of my previous attempts had succeeded. However, I have said all I wanted to say, albeit to a minute audience of myself and a few editors and friends. Even more important, all I wanted to say is being said by others and being said better than I know how to say it. I have no more to add.

I quit the Church, for all intents, with the promise that I'll be back when my daughters are elders and D&C 132 is eliminated from the canon with an apology from God. (I used to have another demand concerning a certain ritual, but I'm told it has been taken care of.) Now I'm likewise terminating my identification with part of the little community camped out—manuscripts in hand—on DIALOGUE's doorstep. But the difference between the first leaving and the second is that the one I left angry, the other I leave with the warm feeling that it'll be just fine without me.

That warmth comes from reading in the Fall 1990 issue of DIALOGUE about Helen Candland Stark's experiences with the Church's strong-arm tactics as it pursued a political objective. These were also my feelings. I identified with much in the excellent articles by Lavina Fielding Anderson and Amy L. Bentley. I knew nothing of what Bentley described and feel comforted that others were involved years before I caught fire and that the movement is still alive, albeit in a changed and changing state.

More important, however, I identified with Stark's self-discovery and her eventual experience of inner wholeness. This has also been my experience. At my darkest time, after realizing that I'd been chasing an aery phantom instead of truth, first the earth and then the universe itself, as Stark experienced, extended to me love, comfort, and insight, allowed me to glimpse the divine center within another and feel it within myself. I saw clearly after this inner-healing experience that patriarchy, which I interpret much the same as does Alison Walker in her forthright and factual article, "diminishes" and "distorts" the full humanity of women and men. Institutions that reflect and support patriarchy anger me still.

The truth, and it is a comforting truth at that, that I've settled on as *the Truth* is the one that Veneta Nielsen quotes from May Swenson: "Life is to find." Life is exciting again, now that all I have are questions and the feeling, given as a love-gift from the universe, that I am a loved, accepted, and hence worthwhile part of some undefined/undefinable whole. Thus, with Stark's experience mirroring my own, with Walker expressing my feelings and convictions, and with Swenson expressing the One Truth I've come to believe, what more could I possibly say?

Abraham Van Luik
Richland, Washington

Is There an Index?

A comprehensive index to the *Journal of Discourses* has been needed for some time. When I conclude my five-volume series, *Collected Discourses*, I will be publishing an exhaustive index for that series and for the *Journal of Discourses*. Anyone with knowledge of a *Journal of Discourses* index, or currently working on such a project, please contact me so that we might avoid duplicating our efforts. I

would gratefully appreciate any assistance or suggestions.

Brian H. Stuy
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Congratulations

I've just finished reading your last issue (Fall 1990) and write to congratulate you. The issue highlights my interest and experience and does it eloquently and accurately.

Esther Peterson
Washington, D.C.

"Of General and Enduring Value"

DIALOGUE gets better with age—both as a verb and a proper noun. The informative accounts in the Summer 1990 issue of how our RLDS cousins have handled the issue of baptism for the dead (Roger Launius); how the doctrine developed among the Saints in early Nauvoo (Guy Bishop); and the finely tuned comparative piece by Grant Underwood were indeed worthy of the name of dialogue. John Dewey once remarked that "Democracy begins in conversation," and I am tempted to say it might even be the beginning of understanding religion if we'd give it a chance. There's precious little of it in church meetings, however, so thanks for providing a forum for dialogue by proxy. It often makes my Sabbath!

Guy Bishop's comment that baptism for the dead was not a part of nineteenth-century American religion and that it was left to Joseph Smith and the Mormons "to establish a doctrinal stance on the subject" (p. 85) led me to reflect on a piece of information I picked up some years ago. This historical reference links the doctrine and practice with the eighteenth- century Seventh Day German Baptists of the Ephrata Cloister in Pennsylvania, and I thought it might be worth sharing with DIALOGUE readers.

In his book *Conrad Weiser: Friend of Colonists and Mohawk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1945), Paul A. Wallace gives an account of eighteenth-century frontiersman Conrad Weiser's experience at Ephrata (c. 1738). In a chapter entitled "Conrad Weiser Becomes A Priest After the Order of Melchizedek" Wallace says:

> Our of the brain of Emanuel Eckering (Elimelech) there sprang that same year, 1738, the ingenious concept of the Baptism for the Dead. Persons who had died without the grace of total immersion might yet be saved if they were baptized by proxy. Peter Miller, who never lost his head amid all these insinuating mumeries, was against it; but [Conrad] Beissel [leader of the Seventh Day Baptists], ready as always to follow a religious wil-o'-the-wisp, set his seal upon it. Emmanuel Eckerling was the first to receive baptism in this kind. In a pool of the Cocalico, under Beissel's hands, he was immersed on behalf of his departed mother. The principle once accepted, the thing became popular, and the next world must soon have been swarming with souls so astonished to find themselves sainted by Cocalico immersion *in abstentia*. (p. 104)

Wallace cites as his source volume 1 of J. F. Sachse's *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1899), which adds that baptism for the dead was "practiced for many years" at Ephrata, that it outlived and went beyond that community and was accepted by people of other faiths. Sachse also claims that as late as the 1840s there were traditions of "children having become substitutes in Baptism for parents, or *vice versa*" (p. 366).

Whether there is any connection between Emanuel Eckerling's baptism for the dead in Pennsylvania and Joseph Smith's thinking a century later in Nauvoo would no doubt be difficult to ascertain. However, if we have learned anything about Mormon history over the past couple of decades, it is that nothing is as simple or as obvious as it seems—including perhaps what we thought was our unique Mormon concept of baptism for the dead.

I also thoroughly enjoyed the articles dealing with Mormon fundamentalism

in the same issue of DIALOGUE. Martha Bradley and Ken Driggs are to be complimented for their sensitive and insightful presentations on an important aspect of Mormon history. Indeed, their accounts of contemporary plural marriage helped me understand with more empathy the commitment, turmoil, and dilemmas which nineteenth-century LDS communities faced as well as giving me a better understanding of the twentieth-century fundamentalist perspective.

I was interested in a book that Driggs mentioned, *Revelations of a More Enduring Value*, supposedly prepared for publication in 1930 by James E. Talmage. LeRoy Johnson had the publication date correct, but a conversation I had with T. Edgar Lyon of the LDS Salt Lake Institute of Religion around 1959 leads me to believe the editor of this "expurgated" version of the Doctrine and Covenants was actually John A. Widtsoe. I have a copy of this book published by the Church in 1930, and it is entitled *Latter-day Revelations: Selections from the Book of Doctrine and Covenants*. Section 1 is entitled "The Voice of the Lord to All People"; Section 19, "Christ Victorious and Omnipotent"; Section 27, "Sacramental Emblems and the Future Communion"; Section 110, "A Glorious Theophany Followed by Visitations of Ancient Prophets," and so forth.

According to Brother Lyon, John A. Widtsoe prepared this edition while he was in the British Mission in the 1920s in an effort to make the revelations more readable and less encumbered by long-forgotten historical circumstances. The book excluded Section 132 permitting plural marriage and, of course, the Manifesto banning it. The "indignant" response of people like LeRoy Johnson apparently elicited a Church reaction: Bro. Lyon told me that these exclusions led the fundamentalists to charge that the Church was changing the scriptures. This was apparently too much for the brethren; and consequently the book, more readable though it may have been, was recalled and the unsold copies supposedly destroyed. The copy I have was purchased originally by my brother in the United Kingdom in the 1960s.

The book's unsigned "Foreword" commented that many of the original revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants had become of "relatively reduced importance with the passing of the conditions that brought them forth" and that the purpose of the edited version was to present "scriptures of general and enduring value." Eighty-five sections and parts of sections were removed, leaving forty-one revelations or 30 percent of the Doctrine and Covenants classified as of "general and enduring value." Deletions were, of course, indicated by asterisks.

The standard which the editor (presumably Widtsoe) used in determining which parts of the revelations were *not* of "enduring value" was apparently the extent to which they addressed problems which at one time were of "present and pressing significance" but were no longer important. It would be interesting to know if Widtsoe discussed his criteria with the Twelve in the course of his work and how he responded to the fundamentalist criticism. I wonder, too, if any non-fundamentalist Latter-day Saints objected to the editing of the revelations given to Joseph Smith and to the use of decidedly un-Mormon terms such as "communion," "theophany," and "Holy Trinity" in the titles.

Of course, editing the "word of the Lord" is nothing new, and each editor has good reasons for the deletions made: Thomas Jefferson, for instance, was very clear about his criteria when he edited the New Testament. He simply deleted any miracles that didn't meet his enlightenment standards of rationality and retained only things of a moral nature. For Jefferson, events which could not be explained rationally were apparently not "of enduring value" and therefore not worth keeping in the canon. I seem to recall reading of an early Christian missionary who excluded references to the

Lord as a "god of battles" from the Old Testament when he translated it for the warring tribes of Eastern Europe. He did so because he believed they did not need any divine encouragement to fight! In this case perhaps selective editing of scriptures has its place.

However, it fairly boggles the mind to think what *might* have happened if the idea of *Latter-Day Revelations* had caught on and the Bible and the Book of Mormon had also been reduced to those parts of "general and enduring value." Come to think of it, reading expurgated versions would certainly make daily scripture reading more efficient—one could read all the "necessary" parts more frequently in the course of a year. To paraphrase Mark Twain's comment about excluding "And it came to pass" from the Book of Mormon: deleting the outdated historical details from our scriptures might leave us with a fair-sized booklet. In addition, if we viewed the scriptures as ahistorical documents, we would no longer need to worry about historical consistency or disturbing new documentary discoveries made by prying historians! By turning our back on *Latter-Day Revelations*, we may have missed a golden opportunity to simplify our lives . . . and our thinking!

Frederick S. Buchanan
Salt Lake City, Utah