

Counting the Cost

For decades a struggle has existed between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Christian community at large. The LDS church wishes recognition as a bona fide "Christian" denomination with full brotherhood in the Christian fold. They refuse on the basis of their definition of a Christian. The LDS church argues that a Christian is one who believes in Jesus Christ and follows his teachings and on that basis Mormons are Christians as much as they are. After all, in the name of the church, the chief subject of its sermons and central character of its theology is the savior Jesus Christ.

"No," they say, "you can't be Christian because you don't believe in Jesus Christ the *way* we do. Our Christ is part of the trinity, a concept you reject. You say the same religious words as we do but you mean different things by these words. Your meanings are alien to us. You don't belong."

Similarly, some leaders of the LDS church are employing the same exclusionary tactics against LDS intellectuals and liberals.

The alternate voices say that they believe in Joseph Smith as a God-inspired prophet who brought forth the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ in whom alone there is salvation from the sin and sorrow of this world. They acknowledge at the same time that there may be some difficulties in the historical facts which traditionally support Mormon beliefs. However, they steadfastly hold to the idea in spite of the historical anomalies. They want to belong. It is important to them.

Yet the official church tells intellectuals that they must believe in Christ the *way* the spokesmen do (with complete and unilateral acceptance of the histori-

cal traditions), otherwise they may not be "one of them."

If church leaders have been puzzled by the dogmatic, intolerant behavior of Christian fundamentalists toward Mormons, now they can at least understand where the fundamentalists are coming from. They can say, "We understand now why you exclude us. It makes perfect sense for you to protect your strict views by excluding peculiar notions. We won't try to persuade you any more. We didn't understand until now. We're sorry."

Or they can say, "If it is patently unfair for fundamentalist Christians to exclude us as they do, then it is equally unfair for us to do the same thing to our own brothers and sisters in the gospel, who are part of the church we all belong to. It didn't occur to us that this is what we were doing. It must have seemed very unjust. We're sorry."

If any of this argument makes sense, they ought to apologize to *somebody*. But maybe having power means never having to say you're sorry.

A second effect of this accusatory tactic is to objectify the LDS intellectual/liberal/dissenter/non-conformist the same way a slave or an abused individual is made into something morally less than all the rest of us. If you believe that a person is less than what you are or wholly other from you, a non-person, you feel morally justified when you abuse them. You can punish, you can restrict, you can muzzle them, you can label them, you can discount their experience, you can impugn their character and accuse them of being unrighteous, all without becoming blameworthy.

These responses to the intellectual by professing Christians are, however, blameworthy on other grounds. Is it what Jesus himself would do? How would he handle the "sinner," the way-

ward one, the prodigal, the one who has "lost his way"? (That is, if you believe the intellectual is one who is "wayward" or "has lost his way.") How long was he patient with stiff-necked Israel? (Maybe the fundamentalist Christians are right about Mormons not being Christian.) Are the actions in the above paragraph the sort of conduct enjoined in D&C 121? Would a priesthood brother do those things to another priesthood brother or sister? Isn't love the answer rather than objectification?

When you objectify someone—a woman or a foreign enemy or a perceived unbeliever—you are not obligated to "walk in their shoes," to try to understand things from their perspective, to ask yourself how they must feel. It would not make sense. They certainly do not feel the way you do, so you can mistreat them. Besides, it's for their own good, and they can't feel it anyway. Surely it would be improper to respond to their questions, to address the issues they raise. One cannot do that and maintain the objectified relationship. That would be treating them as you would wish to be treated. (Yet another familiar Christian injunction—"the Golden Rule"—falls victim to oppression.)

In conclusion, we must ask another question: Just how "dangerous" are these alternate voices? In a church of 8.5+ million worldwide, how threatening can less than .05 percent of the membership be? That is based on a rough estimate of *Sunstone/Dialogue* adherents. The actual voices are far fewer. When the Jewish nation was troubled by a small group of "alternate voices," one of the Sanhedrin proposed a different response than the usual. He suggested they be left alone on the grounds that error has a way of defeating itself and gradually disappearing from the scene, whereas truth will succeed in spite of

effort to extinguish it. Where is Gamaliel now that he needs him.

The general counsel coming down to the membership regarding response to opposing voices from outside the church, "anti-Mormons," etc., is to ignore them. Members are not to dignify their statements with a reply. Why does the church treat its own worse than it treats outsiders? Is it because its own are "family." In the church, the family is the central unit, the foremost model for governance. Yet social experience reveals that it is in the family where most of the abuses against individuals occur. It is where free agency is allowed to flourish least. Are official church actions just a reflection of prevalent, yet unspoken and unendorsed, attitudes toward family members who seem too different?

The previous questions demand a final question: Just how dangerous is the official response to these alternate voices? What do you stand to lose by allowing dissent and what do you stand to lose by crushing it? Count the cost.

Christopher P. Russell
Salt Lake City, Utah

Profound Deceit

Thank you for another attractive and substantive issue (Fall 1993). Let me offer a few comments about F. Ross Peterson's articulate review of *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case*, by Richard Turley, regarding the Mark Hofmann case, that appeared on pages 217-19.

First, a correction. Although *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders* (which I co-authored with Allen Roberts) reached bookstores in April 1988, it was not "published before Hof-

mann's confession was released." The book deals thoroughly with his discussions with the prosecutors, released July 1987, and his January 1988 board of pardons hearing, at which he discussed the murders.

Certainly deceit fueled Hofmann's victimization of many including the LDS church and certain churchmen. How ironic that Turley's important disclosure (in proving that church leaders were straightforward) is that two apostles—and Turley and perhaps other employees—each knowingly withheld the William E. McLellin collection from court proceedings and allowed false testimony to be entered below the names of two general authorities.

Let Turley argue from hindsight with the views and conclusions of those most involved in the case and most interviewed; the existence and location of the McLellin collection were viewed by law enforcers as crucial. Beyond this profound deceit, consider the disrespect shown to the court, to the constitutional principle of separation of church and state, to the deceased and their survivors, and to all of us who accepted those sworn statements in good faith.

Thanks to Ross Peterson for a precise analysis of how history-phobia set the stage and moved the plot. Turley's information and the current openness regarding the McLellin collection are laudable since such improve the general enlightenment. Weighed against the human costs of this tragedy and the monumental effort to bring Hofmann to even a compromise justice, doesn't this influx seem a bit late?

Linda Sillitoe
Salt Lake City, Utah

Self-righteousness on a Pedestal

Although I had heard about your journal I had never read it before a few days ago as I strolled through the BYU Bookstore on my way to do some homework. I began reading a wonderfully written article by Paul Richards entitled, "Does Paying Tithing Make You a Voting Shareholder? Brigham Young University's Worldwide Board of Trustees" in the fall 1993 issue, pages 59-69. Mr. Richards is like a breath of fresh air on paper concerning some of the problems he encountered as BYU's Public Communications Director for thirteen years. I found I couldn't put the article down, and although somewhat an expensive purchase for me, I purchased the journal anyway.

It's so good to see an administrator from BYU breathe some realism into some of the challenges they're faced with, particularly from our own LDS community. I'm quite sure because of the many controversial elements of our church that serving as BYU Public Communications Director is not an easy challenge, however Margaret Smoot (the current Public Communications Director here) should at least consider taking some lessons from a real pro.

Since my conversion to the LDS church and my flight here from Cincinnati to attend school I've been quite surprised by some of the extremely narrow-mindedness of the Mormon community here in this area. It's nice to see someone not pander to all of those who bring the church to a lower level by arrogantly and openly setting their self-righteousness upon a pedestal for everyone to view!

John Pollard
Provo, Utah

Memberships on the Line

The enclosed contribution will not only restore my *Dialogue* library from errant borrowers but is given in the spirit of saying thank you for issues such as spring 1993. For me, that issue is what *Dialogue* is all about and is representative of its best energy and creativity. It should be part of what is most helpful to the church but appears to be part of what is so unfortunate, namely, action such as that taken against Lavina Fielding Anderson.

I understand your challenges and vividly recall our executive committee meeting more than twenty years ago when we decided to print the spring 1973 issue of *Dialogue*, which included the article by Lester Bush, "Mormonism's Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview," as well as responses and perspectives. Since a draft of the article had some degree of circulation, we were told, by those who think they should speak up for the leaders of the church, that we were putting our memberships on the line. Although concerned about these rumors, our hope was that the article would motivate thought and prayer.

Keep up the good work.

Tom Anderson
Los Angeles, California

Damages Credibility

I felt Brent Metcalfe's article in the fall 1993 issue on the debate about the Book of Mormon ("Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," pages 153-84) was quite weak. This kind of article damages *Dialogue's* credibility and its

appeal to the LDS community.

Russell Frandsen
La Canada, California

A Step in the Right Direction

In my opinion Brent Lee Metcalfe's article "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity" in the fall 1993 issue was first-rate. He asks readers to reexamine our assumptions about the Book of Mormon, and to keep clear the important distinction between what the Book of Mormon says and what people say *about* it—either faith-promoting or critical. Particularly useful is his discussion of how some modern Mormon scholars limit Book of Mormon geography to Mesoamerica, and thus dismiss the traditional pan-American geographical context of Joseph Smith, W. W. Phelps, and Orson Pratt. This creates a quandary for anyone who wants to fit the Book of Mormon into a New World geography.

Metcalfe also points out the inconsistency of using examples of Book of Mormon chiasmas to demonstrate its historicity and antiquity, when just as intricate occurrences of chiasmas can be located in Joseph Smith's revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants and in his private journals.

Metcalfe's essay is not the last word—when will we ever have the last word?—but it does provide an incentive to look again at the Book of Mormon. I often tell research patrons at the Marriott Library at the University of Utah, where I work, to read as widely as possible on all sides of an issue and then to draw their own conclusions. A lot is at stake and Metcalfe's article is a step in

the right direction.

Stan Larson
Salt Lake City, Utah

Gifts to Offer

Thank you for publishing the courageous article, "You Are Not Alone: A Plea for Understanding the Homosexual Condition," by T. J. O'Brien, in your fall 1993 issue, pages 119-40. It was carefully written, extremely well-documented, and very sensitive.

I am the mother of a bisexual son, who has had homosexual relationships. He is presently in a heterosexual marriage, and it seems to be successful. I am hoping that he and his wife continue to be happy and that they will give me grandchildren to enjoy, but none of us knows the future of relationships, we only work for and hope for the best.

For several years my son lived with another young man in a homosexual relationship. My husband and I tried very hard to support our son. He was quite afraid to divulge his situation to us, because he had known many friends in the gay community whose families had totally rejected them when they discovered the nature of their orientation. I refused to do this to my child and I hope that others can rethink their values enough to realize the great loss they are creating in their lives and that of their children, if they abandon their child because they happen to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. I know how confusing it can be to a parent to make this discovery, but if they will but listen to their child and try very hard to read and study about sexual minorities, they can become enlightened to the fact that simply because we are different from

one another in our perceptions of life, gender, and sexual orientations, doesn't mean that we don't have a gift to offer.

Those people in the church, who interpret things so harshly as to reject those who don't seem to fit the mold of conformity, make it very hard for both the family and the person who belongs to the sexual minority. I have found it quite distressing to consider even approaching this subject with the average members of the church, even though I know that there are many who are compassionate and understanding. It is frightening to many of us to take the chance that someone will not understand and instead preach to us. It is inconceivable to me to think that Christ would reject someone simply because they felt affection toward persons of the same sex. I was always taught that Christ wanted us to feel affection for everyone!

The issue of celibacy is an especially poignant one for me. I cannot understand how anyone can say it is acceptable, even desirable, for a heterosexual person to be encouraged to enter into a life of intimacy with an opposite-sex person, but deny that to the homosexual person. If committed relationships were encouraged for persons of same-sex orientation the same way they are for opposite sex persons, there would be far more stability in the gay community. People could more easily be honest about who their partners are and not live the life of lies because they want to remain accepted in the church and in society as a whole. It saddens me to see this condition exist.

I recommend that people follow Brother O'Brien's suggestions. If you know or meet (you have and will, you may not realize it) someone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, be compassionate, kind, and accepting. If

you need support from others as a parent, sibling, spouse, child, or are yourself a member of a sexual minority, go to P-FLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Organization.

Thank you again for allowing Brother O'Brien to express the thoughts and ideas that have needed to be expressed to our community.

Carolyn W. Perna
Seattle, Washington

A Clarification

I recently received a letter of clarification from Gilbert W. Scharffs, a counselor in the presidency of the University of Utah Second Stake, who called a woman as president of the stake Sunday school. This incident is reported in my "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership" (Spring 1993), page 11, and is referenced to a news item in *Sunstone* (n8). Brother Scharffs wanted

to make it clear that he had not come to me "and complained about being harassed by Church leaders." He explains:

Yes, I was involved with calling sisters into our stake Sunday school presidency which the stake president approved after consulting with a General Authority. Then one of the sisters called mentioned this to her mother, who went to [a] General Authority to complain that she did not think this was right. I heard that this issue was discussed in a meeting of Church leaders and there was a difference of opinion. Our stake presidency was notified that although there is nothing doctrinally wrong with calling sisters to these positions, that it was felt that at the present time only men should be called, since it was important to develop male leadership qualities in the Church so that we might have stronger and more faithful husbands.

I'm happy to pass on his clarification.

Lavina Fielding Anderson
Salt Lake City, Utah