

LETTERS

"Spiritual Oppression"

I was impressed with the letter from Eileen Davies published in the winter 1993 issue, especially in her reference to the Savior's clearing of the temple. She asserts that "If the leaders of the church do not alter their behavior . . . they will move even farther from Jesus." In contrast to this, Joseph Smith taught what he called "an eternal principle, that has existed with God from all eternity: That man who rises up to condemn others, finding fault with the Church, saying that they are out of the way, while he himself is righteous, then know assuredly, that that man is on the high road to apostasy, and if he does not repent, will apostatize, as God lives." This is not an easy principle to live; its implications are sometimes painful, especially considering the fact that we are each given moral agency and a responsibility to work out our own salvation.

There is a significant difference between what the Savior did in the temple and what we do when we lift our hand to steady the ark. The Savior had the authority to set the temple in order. As politically incorrect as it may be, the true church in all dispensations has been led hierarchically.

I'm sure that when the Savior overturned tables of money and set soon-to-be-sacrificed animals free, scattering the profits and the commodities of the children of the covenant, upsetting their livelihood and traditions by striking out against their material and spiritual way of life, that many accused *him* (in Davies's words) of "spiritual oppression."

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The Divine in Each of Us

In the winter 1993 issue Helen Cannon criticized Jack Newell's essay entitled "Liberal Spirituality: A Personal Odyssey" (Spring 1993) for "his reverence for Joseph Campbell's flawed philosophies." Cannon assailed Campbell and his ideas, charging that he "is not well thought of in the scholarly community." To substantiate her position, she noted the absence of any reference to Campbell in her Folklore and Religion class text and cited two authorities: a reviewer of a Campbell biography and the author of a memoir about Campbell. Quotes from the latter not only maligned Campbell's scholarship, but attempted to defame his character based on anecdotal evidence from the 1960s.

Cannon's attempt to disparage Campbell was presented within the context of the authority system known as scholasticism. This approach, in which a proposition is validated by citing qualified authorities, promotes erudition built on a foundation of accepted knowledge and rejects ideas inconsistent with conventional wisdom. Criticism is justified when scholars fail to provide insightful analysis and logic supported by credible references. In this case, however, the system was abused by poor scholarship on the part of the critic which, if allowed to go unchecked, encourages intolerance and intellectual snobbery.

One failing of the authority system is that now and then radicals come along with personal observations or experiences that cannot be explained within the framework of traditional knowledge. Some scholars, fearing challenges to the status quo, have historically gone to great lengths to oppose change. Fear and distrust of experience places scholasticism at odds with sci-

ence, which relies on observation to disprove hypotheses, and with individuals, who promote personal experience as a method of validating knowledge. When these new ideas have merit, it is not unusual to see attempts to depreciate the message by defaming the messenger.

Joseph Campbell was the world's foremost authority on mythology, a pre-eminent scholar, writer, and teacher whose work continues to profoundly influence millions. His work is insightful and well researched. The reason he is considered a heretic by some scholars is because he believed that ultimate authority resides in personal observation and experience rather than tradition. He encouraged his students to personally experience God and the rapture of being alive.

Campbell's teachings are often described as simplistic and selfish by critics who have not taken the time to understand or experience them. "Follow your bliss" is not the advice of some spiritual hippie; it predates New Age feel-good nonsense by several millennia. The bliss to which Campbell referred came from the Sanskrit word *Ananda*, meaning bliss or rapture, which is the jumping-off place into transcendence (*The Power of Myth* [New York: Doubleday, 1988], 120). His message is that we can approach God without relying on external authority. Personal experiences that come from following our heart manifest that which is Divine in each of us.

It is ironic that LDS scholars so readily discount experience in favor of traditional scholasticism. The theme of the origin of the church and the Book of Mormon is that truth can be validated by personal experience. Tolerance for this belief would go a long way in mending the rift between the general member-

ship and those members who call themselves intellectuals. They may come to appreciate that while following your bliss does little to advance scholarly arguments, it is not bad advice for those looking for God.

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A World Figure in Context

D. Michael Quinn's essay, "Ezra Taft Benson and Mormon Political Conflicts" (Summer 1993), is obviously an extensively researched, detailed, interesting piece of information. However, to what extent is it history? In a minimalist sense—as a chronicle of numerous small, local events—it is. However, as I understand written history, a mature historian—as distinguished from a mere chronicler—has vision, giving not only the little details but, most importantly, putting these details into their larger context. Mr. Quinn's essay is defective as true history because it ignores the larger issues of the time it purports to cover.

For example, in this essay Mr. Quinn primarily discusses the anti-communist movement in Utah during the 1950s to the 1980s, emphasizing then-Apostle Benson's activities against communism and their effects on the church. Strangely, however, Mr. Quinn ignores major world events during this same time period, e.g., Soviet troops marching into Hungary in 1956, the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, Soviet and Warsaw-Pact troops invading Czechoslovakia one night in 1968, etc. Aren't these headline events relevant to any discussion of anti-communist activi-

ties—whether in Utah or any other part of the globe? Wouldn't a paragraph or two about some of these specific events give readers, especially younger readers, a more complete picture of these times?

Furthermore, besides ignoring world events, Mr. Quinn ignores the intellectual turmoil of the times. For one thing, he treats communism as an abstraction. There's no recognition in his essay that communist governments treat their citizens differently than do democratic governments. His only "discussion" of communism comes in a footnote in which he explains his guidelines for capitalizing the word (n12). However, how many readers need to know whether the word communism is capitalized? How many more need to know how communism operates?

For example, many readers who are writers would be interested to know that in at least one communist country, Albania, typewriters had to be registered with the government. As part of the registration requirement, owners submitted a sample of type-written work—apparently so the government could trace any typewritten literature by comparing type-face markings. Furthermore, readers who wear eye glasses would be interested to know that in Southeast Asia during these times as communists moved in, the first people to disappear in the middle of the night were those who wore eye glasses. Apparently glasses signified persons who read and hence who thought and hence who might not think good thoughts about the changes communists were making. In sum, communism has never been an abstract threat; communism has always been a concrete threat—as the Berlin Wall made literally apparent.

Furthermore, besides ignoring the nature of communism, Mr. Quinn also

ignores the political concept President Benson was defending—liberty. The major point of Mr. Quinn's piece seems to be that President Benson disturbed the decorum of the church and the nation from the 1950s to the 1980s for a not-so important reason, i.e., Mr. Quinn seems to be saying that since we lived in the land of liberty, then-Apostle Benson was making an unnecessary fuss about something we already had. Mr. Quinn essentially treats liberty as only one value among many values in a democracy, one that is no more important than, say, compromise or accommodation to other view points. (I would be curious to know how Mr. Quinn would explain the activities of Thomas Jefferson during the 1770s or those of Abraham Lincoln during the 1850s and 1860s. Both of these leaders also disturbed the decorum of their times.)

Consequently, because of the omission of these larger historical and intellectual issues, President Benson's activities at this time cannot be fairly understood from this essay.

As a corrective to Mr. Quinn's long but simplistic piece—to see the forest as well as the twigs—I would first recommend to *Dialogue* readers Sheri L. Dew's biography of President Benson which Mr. Quinn cites. In particular, Ms. Dew's passage explaining President Benson's visit to the Soviet Union in 1959 while he was U.S. Secretary of Agriculture—especially his impromptu speech to the congregation at the Central Baptist Church of Moscow—captures the essence of these larger issues in just four pages (341-45).

Furthermore, from secular sources perhaps the best intellectual explication of these larger issues comes from the work of Friedrich A. Hayek, co-winner of the Nobel Prize for economics in 1974. In his most famous book, *The Road*

to *Serfdom*, Hayek explains why liberty is ever vulnerable and why socialism is never benign. Building on David Hume's statement that "it is seldom that liberty of any kind is lost all at once," Hayek argues that socialism inevitably leads to serious problems, the worst being totalitarian government. In particular, Hayek, writing this book while teaching at the University of London during the rise of Hitler, entitled one chapter, "The Socialist Roots of Nazism." However, while dedicating this book to "The Socialists of All Parties," Hayek, in a painstaking, nonaccusatory analysis, treats socialists not as traitors but merely as naively trusting, well-meaning people lost in intellectual error. In a subsequent, more detailed volume, *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek argues that liberty is not just one value among many but the most important value of any progressive society, the "source and condition of most moral values."

Regardless, my point about Mr. Quinn's essay is that small events have little or no meaning by themselves, except in a parochial sense. Because of the limited focus of this essay, many readers may too quickly judge President Benson's activities as extreme. And there are problems with extremism in the defense of liberty. (Some of these are explained by Mr. Hayek in his concluding chapter to *The Constitution of Liberty*, "Why I Am Not a Conservative.")

Fortunately, Mr. Quinn's piece is apparently a first draft for a larger work. If Mr. Quinn wants President Benson's activities on behalf of liberty to be truly understood—and appreciated—he will not focus narrowly on events in Utah. A first-class historian of this period would place President Benson's activities within the larger context of intellectual and world history. Ezra

Taft Benson was a world figure long before he became president of the church and deserves to be presented in that context.

As for me—as a person who wears eye glasses and who uses a word processor and printer in my home—I'm very grateful President Benson spoke out forcefully against communism. I believe there was an Evil Empire and that he helped crack its foundation. Yes, he did ruffle feathers and disturb the decorum most of us prefer. But as one of the few people in all history to have spoken up for liberty, he deserves our admiration. His life is unique, as Ms. Dew's biography shows, for combining action, thought, and faith. And his life proves once again, as the scriptures show, a prophet of God has never had it easy.

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Palmyra Professors

In the winter 1993 issue Stephen J. Hammer in his article "Professional Myths About Latter-day Therapy" made the usual mistake in saying that the "professors" mentioned in Joseph Smith-History 1:19 are "public teachers." To say that "professors" were public teachers is not consistent with: (1) the dictionary meaning of the word, (2) with the context of its use in JS-H, and (3) the schools in the Palmyra area in the spring of 1820.

The context is local churches and their creeds. The key thoughts in verses 18 and 19 (up to the word "professor") are: (1) Joseph Smith asks "which of all the sects was right" (these sects are the local churches mentioned in vv. 5, 8-10);

(2) Joseph is told he should join none of them, as they were all wrong; and (3) the creeds of these churches were an abomination in God's sight.

We should also consider the meaning of "professor" in dictionaries of the 1820 period. The first definition of "professor" in three dictionaries of the period is: "One who makes open declaration of his sentiments or opinions; particularly, one who makes a public avowal of his belief in the Scriptures and his faith in Christ, and thus unites himself to the visible church" (*An American Dictionary of the English Language* [1828], by Noah Webster); "One who declares himself of any opinion or party" (*A Dictionary of the English Language* [1805], by Samuel Johnson); "One who declares himself of any opinion or party" (*A Dictionary of the English Language, Abridged by the Editor, from that of Dr. Samuel Johnson* [1876], edited by Robert Gordon Latham). A "professor" then, by the first definition, in the context of JS-H 1:18, 19 is one who accepts (professes belief in) the creeds that were an abomination in God's sight. It is they who were teaching "commandments of men."

Mr. Hammer in his effort to summarize what a professor was only gave the second dictionary meaning and that was incomplete. The second and third definitions of "professor" in the dictionary references above are: "One that publicly teaches any science or branch of learning; particularly an officer in a university, college or other seminary"; "One who publicly practises or teaches an art"; and "One who publicly practises, or teaches, an art . . . One who is visibly religious."

Using the second and third dictionary definitions of "professor" is not consistent with the schools in the Palmyra area in the spring of 1820. It was a

newly-settled area and schools were not sophisticated enough to have "professors" teaching at a college, university, seminary level, or teaching an art. Milton V. Backman in his book *Joseph Smith's First Vision* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971, 1980), 51, reported: "In the summer of 1820 [after Joseph Smith's first vision] an academy was opened in Palmyra village where students studied Latin and Greek. Four years later an independent school was also established there and pupils gathered in the upper room of the academy where they were taught geography, mathematics, astronomy, surveying, grammar, reading, and writing." Schools in the spring of 1820 were one-room school houses teaching the basics—reading, writing, and arithmetic, not church creeds (ibid., 51).

To assume that the JS-H 1:19 meaning of "professor" is the second dictionary definition is inconsistent with the reality of schools in the Palmyra area in the spring of 1820 and with the context of vv. 1:5, 8-10, 18, and 19. To me it is clear that the "professors" in JS-H 1:19 were those who professed to (accepted) the creeds of the Palmyra churches (sects) Joseph Smith was praying about.

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More on A. C. Lambert

In the fall 1993 issue Samuel W. Taylor wrote in an article entitled "The Ordeal of Lowry Nelson and the Mis-Spoken Word," "When A. C.'s [Lambert] secret quest was discovered it cost him his position on the BYU faculty."

Mr. Taylor infers by this that A. C. Lambert was forced to resign. This is not true. My father, A. C. Lambert, left Brigham Young University on his own resignation to become executive dean of Los Angeles State College where he es-

tablished an enviable record for academic and administrative abilities.

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