

LETTERS

Reactions to Lyman's Reaction

Obviously E. Leo Lyman is unhappy with my reaction to his book, *Political Deliverance*, and with my criticism of his reviewers (DIALOGUE, Summer 1988). He leaves the impression I was entirely negative, whereas I actually praised his research of the legislative and political records. I challenged only his conclusion in the book that "the practice of plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints was the foremost obstacle to admission of Utah as a state" (p. 2). I conceded that polygamy was an important factor in the delay.

"Self-deception" and "negligence" were Lyman's words, not mine (Winter 1988, p. 9). Nor did I imply "gullibility" on the part of the reviewers. My only purpose was to suggest that polygamy was not the primary cause for the delay in Utah statehood. This idea is not "the Jensen thesis." I did not originate it; I only accept it.

Lyman would have readers ignore or downplay a central fact of Mormon life during the first four decades in Utah. What he neglects or fails to understand, as do most Latter-day Saints these days, is the idea of the kingdom of God that permeated all levels of the Church during those years. For example, Brigham Young said, "It may be asked what I mean by the Kingdom of God. The Church of Jesus Christ has been established for many years now and the Kingdom of God has got to be established, even that kingdom which will circumscribe all the kingdoms of the world. It will yet give laws to every nation that exists upon the earth. This is the kingdom that Daniel, the prophet saw should be set up in the last days" (*Journal of Discourses*, [Liverpool and London: LDS Booksellers, 1855-

86, p. 275]; *Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*, [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927, pp. 197-98]). This kingdom is what Mormons believed they were building, and their fervor led to economic exclusivity and domination as well as to political control.

How does Lyman explain the intensity of the struggle against economic and political domination that led non-Mormon businessmen and merchants — not just mine owners — to form the Liberal Party, which for years opposed the Peoples Party? Obviously the political struggle was not primarily to fight polygamy. My curiosity is aroused when Mormons now sing the hymn "High on the Mountain Top," having little understanding of its inescapable message, particularly in the last verse.

I mentioned the Godbeite incident in my letter (p. 10) only to illustrate that some Mormons, though a minority, were unhappy with the economy that isolated them from the national mainstream.

If, as Lyman says, I supplied no evidence and he found none in his research to support the thesis I accept, then he must have closed his eyes to the vast references which support it. The works of Klaus J. Hansen and Gustave O. Larson, which he cites in his book but rejects (p. 2), contain ample evidence. And how does he dispose of the statements by Fred T. Dubois and Senator George F. Edmunds, mentioned in my letter (p. 10), the latter reported by George Q. Cannon? Lyman must certainly be aware of the *Salt Lake Tribune* and its opposition to the Church in those days.

A very conservative friend and I discussed Larson's *Americanization of Utah*.

My friend said, "I think it one of the best books about what happened in Utah." I agreed, but we disagreed about the desirability of the outcome. He thought the "Americanization" was good. I thought it unfortunate, even if circumstances demanded it. As an economic historian, I would have liked the Mormon experiment to run longer before it was displaced.

Perhaps a note or two about myself will shed light on my position. By the time the stock market crashed in 1929 while I was on a mission in South Carolina, I had already observed firsthand the evils of poverty and oppression among sharecroppers and cotton mill workers. Living with such people, as missionaries did in those days, affected me. Seeing the ravages of pellagra, I naively determined to study medicine upon my return to try to help. Eye problems, however, kept me from doing laboratory microscopic work, and I had to give up my study of medicine. But I soon realized that the cause of pellagra was not medical but economic. The people were simply too poor to buy nourishing food.

Although I have written several books during my professional career, I have neither researched nor written about Church history. But I have been an avid reader on the subject since my graduate years studying economics at the University of California at Berkeley and through nine years of teaching at the University of Colorado and forty-plus years at Cornell. At Cornell I found an excellent collection of books on Mormonism, dating from the time when Andrew Dickson White, president of Cornell, served as a government envoy to Russia and was embarrassed when Leo Tolstoy asked him questions about Mormonism that he could not answer. When White returned, he established a collection that has been maintained and augmented ever since. I have made good use of that library, particularly during my retirement. I have become a consumer of Church history and am always happy to see new books come forth, including, of course, Lyman's. My

advice is to read it, but read everything else on the topic too.

Vernon H. Jensen
Ithaca, New York

From London to Kaysville

I appreciate Lee Copeland's revealing article (DIALOGUE, Autumn 1988) about past and present racial prejudices in the LDS church. Many members of the "international Church" are unaware of these attitudes and find it difficult to believe racial biases still cloud the vision of many Church members and leaders. The Hyde Park Stake in London is a unique product of the international mission of the LDS church and a good example of how the existing cultural bias in more provincial areas of the Church can be transcended.

During my service as mission president in the stake, it was commonplace for convert baptisms in a given month to represent over twenty different nations. In 1986-87 about one thousand converts were baptized into the stake, only 30 percent of whom were British. The British converts were also from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Four of the seven bishops in the stake have interracial marriages and lead wards as multiracial as any in the Church. Most of these bishops and the members of their wards are unaware of statements by Church authorities against interracial marriage. In my experience, discussing the earlier Church views of racial segregation with these Saints usually only yields negative results. Perhaps this is why Church authorities appear to sidestep the issue.

Recently I accompanied a group of young people to the London Temple; the majority of the group were of black African descent. These young people served as proxies for deceased individuals from nations an apostle once said would never ("not at all," p. 90) receive such vicarious ordinances, let alone administer them. Like Copeland, I use this example not to erode confidence in Church leadership, but to illustrate how vulnerable we all are to

vision-limiting prejudices of any kind. Recent policy changes in the Church affecting blacks, women, and single adults are encouraging, especially in light of the Lord's words to Joseph Smith, "I am not well pleased with many things. . . . But . . . I, the Lord, will contend with Zion, and plead with her strong ones, and chasten her until she overcomes and is clean before me. For she shall not be removed out of her place" (D&C 90:35-37).

I appreciate the warning voice of *DIALOGUE*, which helps me recognize and challenge the cultural biases and prejudices that limit my ability to obey the first and second great commandments.

R. A. Harris
London, England

No Fair-minded Discussion

Although John Quiring's title advertises his essay as a "Critical Appreciation [of Mormon Christianity] by a Christian Pluralist" (*DIALOGUE*, Fall 1988), the article itself is framed and motivated by analysis of his own "fair-minded decision about whether or not to join the Church" (p. 151). In this regard his discussion is fundamentally unsound and its tone often presumptuous and condescending.

Comparative analysis by a perceptive, critical observer looking into an organization from the outside can be valuable. It is not always easy to see the strengths and weaknesses of a group with which one has close ties. Moreover, others do not always see the Church in the same positive light that we see ourselves, and it is good to be aware of their criticisms: some of them are valid. I wonder, however, if Quiring's decision has been "fair-minded," for while he seems to be aware of all the supposed problems associated with the Church and its doctrine, he shows little awareness of its true strengths and its great power to change people's lives. Indeed, he would have us discard those strengths and gut the Church of all those things that make it unique in order to make it more homogenous with

Protestantism. While he is aware of seeming scriptural contradictions and recondite points of doctrine, belief, and practice that are ultimately of little or no importance, he seems to know nothing about those features which any Primary child can identify as basic to the restored gospel and essential to any "fair-minded" decision about joining: faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost.

For all his study of religion, Quiring seems to have no awareness (certainly no first-hand awareness) of the actual conversion experience, the process that convinces converts (to any religion) to abandon old ways and undergo spiritual reorientation. He seems to think that his study alone qualifies him to judge us. There is nothing, however, in his discussion about humility, about a broken heart and contrite spirit; nothing about earnest inquiry through fasting and prayer; there is no struggle of the soul, no wrestle before the Lord like we see in the conversion experience of Enos or even of John Henry Newman; there is nothing of that sincere inquiry of the people who on the day of Pentecost responded to the missionary effort of the apostles by saying: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Certainly there is no response to the challenge given by Peter to "repent and be baptized."

Moreover, he is convinced that effective preaching requires training in the ministry, for he sees our "dreary and lackluster" worship as deficient in the kind of pomp and entertainment he obviously prefers. He is "left with a sunken feeling" by our "sacrament meeting 'talks' . . . delivered by laypersons" and would rather have his relationship with God mediated through a professionally drafted "sermon and pastoral prayer" (p. 155).

Despite his assertion that he was "prepared to treat it with respect" (p. 152), Quiring reduced our sacred text, the Book of Mormon, to the "status of edifying, amateur fiction" and recognizes none of its complexity and power. For him, "the book's narrative material [is] flat, monotonous, imitative of the King James version

of the Bible, and lacking in vitality in contrast to the Bible itself." In short, the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants are "of contestable quality, novelty, origin, historicity, and theology" (p. 155), and "not sufficiently fresh to be taken as new revelations but are derivative" (p. 154). Of course this opinion is itself derivative from 150 years of Protestant criticism of the book. For him, true canonization and validity of a religion's scripture comes through publication (in translation!) as a Penguin Classic (p. 154).

Thank goodness, however, John Quiring has hope for us! He offers us a list of steps to reduce our "pious overestimations," but I'm afraid that when we do that we will no longer belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, but rather to the church of John Quiring. If the Church were perfect, either in the time of Christ or now, the Savior would have had no need to say to Peter, "When thou are converted, strengthen thy brethren." Despite his claim to "Christian pluralism," Quiring reveals in the bibliology and his anxieties about grace a conventional Protestant bias against the LDS church.

Ultimately, the term "Christian pluralist," as Quiring uses it, seems to be nothing more than a euphemism for someone who can't make up his or her mind about which church to join. If his real purpose is to find out which church is true so he can join it, his epistemology (his instrument for inquiry and discovery) is utterly inadequate to the task. Joseph Smith went into the grove with an ontological question, but he emerged with a radical epistemology which repudiated the silencing of God required by traditional Christianity and reasserted the primacy of revelation. Quiring isn't even asking the right questions.

Those who join the Church can usually point to a numinous experience, essentially irrational, inexplicable, and ineffable. It is this kind of personal revelation and testimony which keeps new members in the Church despite the problems. Surely as a student of religion, Quiring should know something of the ineffable, but his aca-

demical training seems to have inculcated in him a predisposition to look on the various faiths of the world as a kind of inexplicable mass hysteria which intelligent and educated people soon grow beyond. In short, as comparative religion the essay is interesting, sometimes even provocative, but as a "fair-minded" discussion of the conversion experience it is a fraud.

Fred Pinnegar
Tucson, Arizona

The Real Story?

In his essay on historiography (Fall 1988), Marvin Hill writes, "Nibley addressed the problem created by the discovery by University of Utah Professor Aziz Atiya of Egyptian papyri which once belonged to Joseph Smith" (p. 118).

After a silence of more than twenty years, I think I had better set the record straight: While acting as an editor of *DIALOGUE* in 1968, I was sitting in the Stanford office talking on the telephone with Klaus Baer, a leading Egyptologist from the University of Chicago, when he let it slip that the Joseph Smith papyri were still in existence (and therefore had not burned up in the Chicago fire as most of us thought). He would tell me no more (probably because he had promised his friend Hugh Nibley that he wouldn't).

I called Wallace Turner of the *New York Times*, who had written a book on Mormons, and set him on the trail. Three days later he called me to report that he had located the papyri in the basement of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, whereupon I called Mr. Fischer, museum director of the Metropolitan, to let him know that we knew where they were. Fischer told me that because *we* knew, the whole Mormon world would know shortly, and that he was faced with a security problem. A day or two later he told me that he had decided that the scrolls could best be kept from harm if the LDS church owned them. When the sale later transpired, the Church issued a press release saying that Professor Atiya had dis-

covered the scrolls while looking for something else in the basement of the Metropolitan. I phoned Attiya to tell him I didn't believe the story, since I knew about the scrolls before he "discovered" them. He became quite nervous and would say only that he was fond of the Church and its people and stood ready to help them in any way he could.

This information should allow someone to research the *real* story of the "discovery," if the trail is not now too cold.

Joseph Jeppson
Woodside, California

A Disappointing Analysis

After reading Lavina Fielding Anderson's article, "A Voice From the Past: The Benson Instructions for Parents" (*DIALOGUE*, Winter 1988), I came to three conclusions:

1. Mormon women live in chronic emotional pain and weep and complain a lot.
2. Mormon men are unaccountably self-assured and don't weep and complain a lot.
3. Prophets should read more statistics before making speeches and never use the word "laundry" without defining it.

I am skeptical of accounts that portray women as emotional buzz saws while men calmly display common sense and appropriate problem-solving skills. Nor am I impelled by secondhand tales heralding all this feminine pain, guilt, anger, and breast-beating. None of this reflects the women I know.

Anderson's tiresome analysis, in which she literally quibbles over pronouns, dissipates her argument. For example, I find no hidden significance in President Benson's incidental use of "her children" (p. 111), instead of "their children," when his meaning is clear. Occasionally, she simply sinks into silliness, such as when she predicts economic failure if we lose the female tax base through lemming-like adherence to President Benson's counsel.

I am equally unqualified to predict that even a short-term withdrawal of working women would act as a massive strike and ultimately do more for economic parity than have decades of women's advocates. This would, of course, put President Benson in the ironic position of making the work force more desirable and rewarding for women, thus earning him plaudits from feminists worldwide. . . . But I, too, digress.

Anderson's topic is important, but she has diminished the issue with a nitpicking, self-indulgent approach. I am disappointed that *DIALOGUE* would publish any article, no matter how well intentioned, justifying a premise relying on "emotions out of all proportion" and made with "no effort to collect opinions randomly and representatively" (p. 104).

Juliann Reynolds
Alta Loma, California

A New Gospel Message

In her review of *Seventh Son* (*DIALOGUE*, Winter 1988), Sandra Straubhaar mentioned her disappointment that Orson Scott Card had not used more explicitly Mormon themes in his previous writings.

In fact, gospel themes dominate every Card work. Moreover, Card's world view is obviously not a "generic brand" of Christianity, but strongly and uniquely Mormon. What other author dares to create Christ archetypes with a tragic streak of violence, saviors who must sometimes destroy for righteousness' sake; or Lucifers who want the right thing for the wrong reasons and will go to any means to get it; sheltered missionaries who "sing their songs" to the world but are inevitably altered — for the better — by the realities they find there; or very human madonnas who are unashamed of their sexuality and only precariously in control of it? Whether or not we want to admit it, these are all distinctive elements of Mormon theology, and Card weaves them masterfully into his tales.

But *Seventh Son* goes a step further, asking questions even Mormons are afraid to tackle. In her review, Straubhaar dwells too much on the white salamander image, which after all is old news by now. She completely overlooks Card's frightening proposition that Satan may be merely a pawn of a more evil force, the "Unmaker" or the "Master of Entropy." And surely it is no accident that the Unmaker uses water as his chief means of destruction when water is such a prevalent symbol in both ancient and modern scripture.

The LDS community should particularly recognize that *Seventh Son* is not simply a vehicle for Card's cute ideas. It presents some daring challenges to both "normal" Christianity and "normal" Mormonism. I submit that Card, in his own way, is preparing us for a very different (dare I say mystical?) gospel message than the one with which we are now comfortable. "He that hath ears to hear. . ."

Dynette Ivie Reynolds
Pullman, Washington

The Problem with Deconstruction

I would like first to commend Dorice Williams Elliott's deconstruction (Spring 1989) of President Hinckley's women's meeting talk. It describes and illustrates a complicated theory clearly and concisely. More important, it exposes very real, though unwitting, assertions of male power over women in President Hinckley's talk.

The article leaves me feeling a little hopeless, however. Elliott's final sentence reads, "But real progress will have been made only when the men in positions of power are also able to escape the confines of their patriarchal discourse and the modes of thinking about women which it forces on all of us." How is this to happen? What would the end product look like if it did? The problem I have with deconstruction is that it is not so good at giving us solutions for the problems it reveals.

The thought patterns of the Mormon patriarchy had not transcended binary opposition in 1978 when black men were given the priesthood. Was that event not "real progress"? Deconstruction helps us see the world of discourse around us with greater subtlety and accuracy. But, progress on the issues it illuminates is possible without the revolution in logic that it demands as a solution. And in fact, that progress may be more real, if less complete, than anything deconstruction can suggest. When the image of complete progress, of an interaction between men and women not based on the inevitable power struggle of binary opposition, is as elusive as it is, we must celebrate encouraging talks like President Hinckley's fully. True, we must be mindful of the residual sexism in every advance women make in the Church. But we must not diminish, in the name of a theoretical, potentially impossible liberation, the real-world ground we have gained.

Helen F. Maxson
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THE ASSOCIATION OF MORMON LETTERS CALL FOR PAPERS

The Association of Mormon Letters will hold its annual symposium at Westminster College in Salt Lake City on Saturday, 27 January 1990. The association invites submissions of papers on any aspect of Mormon literature to be presented at the symposium. Please send proposals by 1 November 1989 to: William A. Wilson, Department of English, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.