

LETTERS

Willing Service

I enjoyed Rebecca Worthen Chandler's "The Wake of a Media Crisis: Guilt by Association or Innocence by Proclamation" (Summer 1992). Many of her suggestions have merit. However, I thought her last two paragraphs gave the Church a bad rap. She failed to consider many facets of Latter-day Saint service, such as the thousands of non-grandstanding public service projects provided worldwide and the trillions of hours of compassionate service.

I am glad that we are no longer having rummage sales like many of our Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish friends. Perhaps Chandler would also like us to emulate their bingo nights, drawings, and other fund-raising schemes to support their churches and paid clergy? No thanks! Perhaps she has forgotten or is unaware that their day care centers and musical productions are money-making programs with salaried staffs, paid music ministers, paid conductors, paid organists, and some paid soloists.

The synagogue blood testing example she used appears to me to be just another example of the kind of grandstanding to which she objects. The Turlock California Ward cultural hall has for over two decades served for blood drives for the regional blood bank. Wards throughout the Church provide their communities with the free use of facilities and free activities, with no donation asked. LDS church groups are also appearing on Adopt-a-Highway project signs in many parts of the U.S. and participating in keeping food banks for the homeless stocked or in actually serving food.

Chandler notes that "our buildings sit almost vacant nearly six days of most weeks." I don't think this is anything unique to Mormon chapels. Most LDS chapels are scheduled so tightly with evening and Saturday activities that it is often difficult to make room for musical and dramatic productions, art exhibits,

troop and district-wide scout courts of honor, scouting merit badge conferences, girl and boy scouts, sports activities, baptisms, fee-free wedding receptions, and family reunions. Day use includes early-morning seminary, aerobics groups, and no-fee funeral services and civil weddings. Many of these events and activities include nonmembers.

Chandler also failed to acknowledge the marvelous community service provided worldwide by the over 1,650 Family History Centers, all of which are open free to anyone who wishes to enter. Between 60 and 70 percent of those who use the Family History Centers are not LDS. Among their ranks are scholars and ministers of other denominations who have become fast friends of the Church. When the Centers were started over three decades ago, the Church did not do it for public relations, but simply as a service. The majority of the centers are open at least three midweek days and nights, and many have additional days and evenings of volunteered service. I have been a director of such a center for over twenty-four years and have worked with many, many volunteers, including a few nonmembers.

Let's not forget that all of us in the Church are volunteers, whether we are preaching Sunday sermons; leading Primary; teaching youth groups, the women's auxiliary, or priesthood; directing music; or organizing activities.

J. Carlyle Parker
Turlock, California

Positive Perspective

When it seems that I want to apostatize from *DIALOGUE*, you present a refreshing and truthful article like "And They Shall Be One Flesh": Sexuality and Contemporary Mormonism" by Romel W. Mackelprang (Spring 1992).

Mackelprang's essay reinforced what I had recently learned in a class on human sexuality at San Jose State University.

Information can be very enlightening and liberating. Our text, *Sexuality Today: The Human Perspective* (Gary F. Kelly, 2d ed., Dushkin Publishing Group, 1990) offered some interesting insights that compliment Mackelprang's thesis: "People who are old today grew up in times during which negative and repressive sexual codes were taught, and many have carried these values with them into old age where they may become self-fulfilling prophecies" (p. 180); "We know that what is learned and incorporated into the depth of one's being exerts some influence on later life and behavior" (p. 158); and, finally, "The repressive sexual attitudes of childhood [have] led to disastrous effects on adult sexual functioning" (p. 10).

Unfortunately, Church leaders seem to teach how evil sex is and wholly forget that there is a good side that should be taught. What about the spiritual side of sex, the bonding, the oneness a couple can feel that transcends the physical experience. The secular world doesn't teach this; I believe the Church should. But will our history of negative thoughts allow us? I have chosen to share and teach my new insights about the true and healthy role of sex with my family. We must never condone ignorance. Our children deserve to learn about sex in a positive, healthy, and spiritual way. We need to educate ourselves through courses and books and then not to be afraid to talk to our children. I wish you well in your efforts to keep publishing such good articles.

Dean Purser
Los Gatos, California

Back to Earth

Romel Mackelprang's comments about sex in the Spring 1992 issue indicate that he is a sensitive and caring individual and has undoubtedly helped some tortured people. However, I find a few fallacies in his thinking.

Fallacy 1: *Church members pay careful attention to what General Authorities say and have said.* Any scholar should know that

only the very few, oft-repeated messages get through at all—and usually only those backed up by loving, explaining parents and local leaders. Only those that filter down to individuals really count. Mormons don't rebel against old, impractical General Authority statements—that would be disloyal. They, like newer General Authorities, simply ignore them. A more accurate but equally irrelevant title for Mackelprang's article could have been: "Sexuality and *Historical Mormonism.*"

Fallacy 2: *Mormons live in a vacuum unaffected by the outside world.* According to Mackelprang, "An affirming sexual culture will likely prevent, and even eliminate, sexual problems for many Church members" (p. 65). The fact is, we are living in the most affirming sexual culture in history; I'll leave it up to the scholars to decide if that has eliminated most sexual problems. General Authority statements about sex must be taken in the context that the average member probably receives 1000 sexually affirming messages for every one urging self-restraint. While it's nice to hear sexually affirming statements from the Church, those in our culture are not receiving an unbalanced number of cautionary messages, as Mackelprang claims.

In fifteen years of teaching teenagers at Church (admittedly in "sex-ridden" California), I've found that the oft-repeated urgings of the prophets and scriptures, when filtered through pop culture and the immense rationalizing abilities of the average teenage Mormon brain, evolves into little more than: "Premarital sex is a sin . . . sort of; easily cleaned up by fifteen minutes with your bishop. Once you're married, go for the gusto." Most bishops resort to encouraging confession to parents only because few kids take sex seriously enough. Obviously, some are more or less serious than others. I doubt if any otherwise-normal youngsters take prophetic counsel as such a negative as to make their lives dysfunctional. Many, however, encounter enormous problems by ignoring prophetic counsel.

As for marital sex, people I know seem to have imperfect but vigorous and active sex lives. Yes, women do experience anxiety—about stretch marks, sagging breasts, and about the young girls at their husband's offices without such things—but not about the details, devices, and positions noted. Men have equally serious anxieties, but not about having too much lust for their own wives. That, simply, is not the problem.

The concern of most bishops I've known is *not* that there is too much sex in marriage but too little. I have known both men and women who have withheld sex, but it has always been during a time of drifting away from the church ideal, not towards it.

Fallacy 3: *Active Mormons are stereotypically repressed, unhappy, and ignorant.* All the Mormons I know really do think oral sex means kissing— thanks for explaining it to us hillbillies.

On the contrary, at a family reunion, I jokingly introduced my wife as “the *only* woman in our ward this year who had *not* had either an affair, a divorce, or a breast implant.” If that seems simplistic and a gross exaggeration of average Mormon mores, then you know exactly how I felt upon reading Brother Mackelprang's paper. Back to earth, folks.

Jon Christopher
Los Angeles, California

Whining Women

Maybe DIALOGUE's current editors prefer a sniveling style of writing, but this reader doesn't and I doubt that many do. An issue or two back, an article whined about the paucity of memorable “stories” in the Book of Mormon. With that attitude, the author probably never told any for his children to remember. At least one commercially successful writer does find in them fodder for inside humor woven into pretty interesting fantasy.

The latest issue concentrates on sniveling about Primary. I used to jokingly call Junior Sunday School “Outer

Siberia,” and believe me, Primary is front and center by comparison. Should members be required to sign in blood that they will “never be late, always be there, promptly at ten in the morning,” and all for the glory? People do shirk. But they also rise to need, serve others well, and grow in the process. Lavina Fielding Anderson has been in Primary too long and needs a different perspective. I resent her inference—no, her outright assertion—that one age group is not as important as another before the Lord—or as easily disregarded. Furthermore, you'd have to be a politician to think of leadership positions as promotions.

Dawn Hall Anderson put her finger quite accurately on the number one problem, inability to appreciate and hence dedicate oneself to callings. Talents might never be discovered without opportunities to try. Unfortunately, her whining went on for pages before she summed up with that point.

I predict that some of today's teachers will be loved and remembered as affectionately as Susette Fletcher Green remembers the Stirlands—or my inactive brother remembers his Blazer teacher. Sorry, the old system had drop-outs, too. The block program with less travel and meetings and more family and community time—and activity days—is better suited to this age when hedonism is eroding youth programs of all kinds.

I appreciate Kathryn Lindquist for showing us the “Bambara Mirror.” I can even appreciate her attempt to identify with those women. But self-flagellation and male bashing didn't just hold up a mirror, they painted a false caricature.

And the lady missionary who broke a rule and blames it on her second president who didn't please her so well as her first is still whining because of his discipline?

Back to the Book of Mormon: it's true, the figurative language and master storytellers, legacies of centuries of development in the Bible, are missing. Nevertheless, your writers could use a dose of

Ammon's patience, perseverance, and hope.

Frankly, DIALOGUE has been beating the "women are picked on" theme to death. If there is another volume dedicated to it, I'll probably ignore it. I hope you don't encourage that habit, for I usually find something worth reading. I'm not suggesting the drone of the party line to which official publications must conform, but, please, not the whine of the party line of NOW, either.

Alice H. Dunn
Rio Dell, California

More to Mormonism

I purchased a copy of your Spring 1992 issue the other day at the Deseret Book store in San Diego. From the comments of the clerk, not many LDS bookstores carry your journal. Frankly, the fewer that agree to carry it, the better you must be! Congratulations.

I'm not a Mormon, but I've been

studying your faith for about six months. It is, honestly, one of the most fascinating and complex belief systems I have ever run across. And I find it quite attractive. The overall doctrinal position seems sound and healthy; the organizational structure, however, leaves me cold.

I especially enjoyed reading Sterling McMurrin's "Comments on the Theological and Philosophical Foundations of Christianity" (p. 37). As the author of several books on church history and doctrine, I particularly appreciated his frank view of pluralism in the early church. I chuckled at his musings over whether Jesus and Paul were on speaking terms. Perhaps Jesus is less appreciative of Paul's Christianity than we in the Protestant world are.

I commend you for your publication and am glad to discover that there is more to the Mormon faith than those who seem intent on keeping it in the conservative corner of our society.

Jeffrey Needle
Chula Vista, California