

Editors' Introduction: The Times—They Are A' Changin'

FOR AN INCREASING NUMBER of Latter-day Saints, recent experiences in the church bring to mind Charles Dickens's description of the revolutionary years of the eighteenth century in his novel, *The Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. . . . It was the season of hope, it was the winter of despair; we had everything before us, we had nothing before us."

In these times of change and possibility for the church, we observe its struggles with complex problems and perplexing dilemmas posed by the modern world. Its responses vary widely but impact us all. The work that "goes forward in an orderly, wonderful way," as expressed by one recent general conference speaker, has unquestionably changed the church. It is now an organization with international dimensions that test established systems of conducting the church's business. Financial control, correlation, standard planning, the emphasis on reduction and simplification while we are at the same time rapidly expanding have altered the relationship between the institution and individual members.

Robert Bellah's recent book, *The Good Society*, suggests that Americans frequently place themselves in an impossible predicament with institutions because both create expectations which are at mutually exclusive cross purposes and cannot be met. As a remedy, Bellah proposes ways in which we can make sense of our institutions by understanding how and why we form them and how they in turn form us. Through this process of shared empathy, members of institutions, churches included, can cooperatively develop ways of altering them for everyone's betterment. This is a challenge worthy of Latter-day Saints as we move with our church into an uncertain future.

This past year has been one of dichotomies, highlighting how important this effort will be. The same year the church's Humanitarian Service Division donated more than a million dollars worth of food and materials to African nations the church's condemnation of members on both the right and the left has created bitterness and suspicion for many. While hundreds

of thousands of new members are joining the church, long-time members are being pressured to leave.

During the same year that the sesquicentennial Relief Society service projects set a new and exciting standard for community involvement and the LDS Foundation donated \$50,000 to Holy Cross Jordan Valley Hospital's new Women's Center, women and men have been officially condemned and privately chastised for praying to Mother God or heavenly parents, a concept some feel comforting and consistent with early church thinking.

It is difficult to reconcile recent general conference addresses like that of Elder Dallas Archibald that reminded us that "attempting to force others to accept our way of thinking will cause them to close their minds to our teachings and ultimately reject our words. They have their free agency," with the recent condemnation of independent study groups, Mormon periodicals and books, and the Sunstone Symposium. At the same time, the debate over academic freedom continues to rage at Brigham Young University challenging the meaning and mission of that institution.

Clearly, these issues do not affect all of us equally or in the same way. In fact, many may find it difficult to identify problems at all and continue to feel welcome in the community of Saints. Nevertheless, there are many among us who privately suffer pain and are searching for a better way.

Often when we find it difficult to understand how an institution works we use family metaphors to describe the interrelationships in an attempt to make the problem more familiar and therefore more easily understood and addressed. In this instance, we might conceive the church as being involved in a confused, messy divorce, or perhaps many thousands of divorces. As the writer Pat Conroy observed when his own marriage dissolved, "each divorce is the death of a small civilization." When one individual is hurt or leaves, that exit effects relatives, friends, neighbors, employers, teachers, clergy, and scores of strangers. When the religious contract between the church and any of its members fails, for whatever reason, the entire church family suffers a great, sometimes irretrievable and uniquely irreplaceable loss. The current attitude of some leaders that apparently certain kinds of members are dispensable flies in the face of Jesus' parables of the one lost sheep and the prodigal son.

When songwriter-singer Bob Dylan wrote his folk anthems, "The Times—They Are A Changin'" and "Blowin' in the Wind" in the 1960s, he posed simple but profound questions echoing the crucial issues of his day. This spirit of concerned questioning, seeking, and striving gave birth to *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* in the same decade. More than twenty-five years later, a similar attitude lives on because the questions remain for the most part open and unresolved. As *Dialogue* moves with the church through the gates of history into the new millennium, important

questions will persist. As editors, we ask readers to join us in bringing a positive answer to the looming query: What kind of religion will Mormonism be? We believe that *Dialogue* can, and of necessity should, play a constructive role in determining the outcome of this question.

Since 1987 *Dialogue* has been in the capable hands of Ross and Mary Kay Petersen and their editorial team. We applaud their thoughtful work and many accomplishments. In keeping with the foundation's policy of bringing new perspectives to the enterprise every five years, a selection team has chosen a new group of editors to take the journal through 1996, the anniversary year of Utah's statehood and the thirtieth anniversary of *Dialogue*, to mid-1997, the sesquicentennial of the Mormon settlement of the Great Basin. Through this momentous half-decade, the journal's co-editors will be Martha Sonntag Bradley and Allen Dale Roberts, with assistance from associate editor Gary James Bergera. The three come to the task after having recently worked together on the *Journal of Mormon History* with editor Lavina Fielding Anderson. Together we have decades of involvement with Mormon publications. Nevertheless, we accepted this new challenge reluctantly and with reservation born of experience. Each of us was already over-committed, but we were all compelled by the belief that *Dialogue* can and must be a force for good, a forum for some of the best thinking in Mormon studies.

We are joined by an entirely new supporting cast including an Editorial Committee, Advisory Committee, and Editorial Board, among others. The Editorial Committee, with whom we will work the most closely, is a diverse group of multi-talented individuals: Delmont Oswald, Director of the Utah Humanities Council, as book review editor; Levi Peterson, professor of English at Weber State University, as fiction editor; as issues and essays editor, Marie Cornwall, professor of sociology at Brigham Young University; Susan Howe, professor of English, also at BYU, as poetry editor; Mark Thomas, banker, as scriptural studies editor; Alan Smith, an attorney, as financial advisor; and Dotti Mortenson, a political scientist, as editor of letters to the editor. The names of other board and committee members are found on the masthead at the front of this, our first issue.

Our initial issue is in large measure an attempt to understand the human aspects of the institutional church, to examine the form it is taking in the 1990s, and to assess and comment on how the church in turns forms us. These essays are written by men and women known to most readers for their thoughtful, caring insight into the nature and quality of our religious life. To some of us, they are revered as mentors. We look to their example as we feel the weight of the passing of the mantle.

In 1992, following the recent fall of Communism and the 1960s acceptance of the reformist provisions of Vatican II, the Roman Catholic church finally admitted to erring for the past 359 years in officially condemning

Galileo Galilei for his belief that the earth revolves around the sun. Pope John Paul II took a personal interest in the case because the church's continued denouncing of Galileo's "heresy" symbolized for centuries the church's apparent rejection of science and modern progress in general. The pope understood the longstanding elements of the conflict between the messages of science and faith. Because of the gravity of the issues at stake, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences took thirteen years to bring the pope a "not guilty" verdict for the scientist who was forced by church inquisitors to "repent" and spent the final eight years of his life under house arrest. In commenting on the problem, the pope observed, "One day we may find ourselves in a similar situation, which will require both sides to have an informed awareness of the field of and limitations of their own competencies."

So it comes to this. Let us all, members and leader-servants of God alike, reason and take on this worthy task together. Because so much of our religious experience plays out, in, and through the institutional church, an improved, more humane and Christlike institution is essential if we are to lead better lives. We have been moved by the recent expressions of several members who have said, almost as if they were singing in unison, "This is my church too." Does the individual Mormon belong to the church or does the church truly belong to the individuals who sustain its existence?

If this is a church by and for the members then it is left to the members to exercise their inherent moral authority through responsible discipleship to make the church better. We are not merely clients or stockholders in the corporate church. We are part of the family of the church—the community of God on earth—an organization whose existence depends on the participation and support of its members. Ideally the institution is in the service of the individual's pursuit of salvation. The institution, in fact, has no independent life and is not an end in itself. It exists solely as a social vehicle for helping people find joy on earth and later happiness in the family of God. The institution and the individual should be engaged in the search for a good and happy life together, and not be at odds with one another in a dichotomous, competitive relationship destructive to both parties.

We choose to believe that this is the spring of hope, that we have everything before us. In these times of change, it is left to each of us to make a difference, through dialogue, in realizing our fondest hopes.