

### *Prefers Free Agency*

I am writing to talk briefly about the article by Rebecca Chandler (Summer 1992). I must first say that I was mostly pleased with the article since I, like she, am interested in seeing how members of the church react to different situations of stress. However, I felt I must write about her reference to free agency. She already has an assumption that "free agency" means the freedom to choose in terms of social and political freedom. While this sounds comforting to many, it is hard to back up with the LDS scriptures which do not refer to "free agency" at all, a term which is a strange one since as a non-LDS professor once remarked to me, "If you have agency, it has to be free." I believe the whole notion is somewhat vague, explaining why in last conference members were told there is no free agency, just moral agency.

I do still like the term free agency, used by almost all the general authorities, but tend to like a definition given by my grandmother, which is also supported by Truman G. Madsen. She wrote: "Free agency implies full freedom of choice, provided, naturally, that the choice does not conflict with the exercise of free agency by others and that the choice is righteous." Madsen gave a similar view, and by choosing evil you lose your freedom, a view also supported by Talmadge in *The Articles of Faith*.

It may be that some of the members who told Rebecca Chandler they were

"entirely free to do exactly what they were told" had an entirely different understanding of what free agency meant; an understanding more in line with the one I like. What I suggest is that free agency is not that well defined, and for this reason Rebecca Chandler may have made a mistake in understanding what the members she talked to meant. As I am an anthropologist, I am well aware that it is hard to present another person's view if you already believe you know the right one and if you have only a cursory knowledge about these people. Reading the conflicting ideas about what agency is, I am not sure there is a right one.

Bruce R. Josephson  
Roanoke, Virginia

### *Alliance Up-Date*

The purpose of my essay, "Sexual Hegemony and Mormon Women: Seeing Ourselves in the Bambara Mirror" (Summer 1992), was to examine both a process people use to define their identities through difference and the ways even strong independent women may inadvertently subordinate themselves to men. An indirect topic was the Ouelessebouyou/Utah Alliance and one of its expeditions to Mali, West Africa, which served as vehicle for my exploration of sexual hegemony within the two cultures. The Alliance has changed since I wrote the paper in 1989

and even since the journal went to press early in 1992. Its progress deserves an up-date.

I am happy to report that late in 1989 most of us women from that expedition were invited to join the Alliance board of directors. Since then one woman has not only been board chairperson but was responsible for guiding the Alliance smoothly and successfully through a rough management transition. Others of us have been committee leaders. All have been instrumental in making women an important component of decision-making (we were always vital to material production) in Alliance projects both at home and abroad.

It would be lovely if I could also say that female genital mutilations have ceased to be performed in Ouelessebou-gou. However, it is a cultural practice imbedded for thousands of years in African tradition; it will not stop abruptly. Perhaps it could be more easily eliminated if it were not so prevalent among most African and Mid-eastern countries. It is estimated that at least 100 million women currently suffer various forms of genital mutilation ranging from clitoridectomies to infibulation.

Even though the Alliance is only now discussing the mutilation problem directly, we have worked hard to build a strong base from which we may be able to address the issue in the future. Our approach to development is through a slow process that emphasizes Bambara ownership of projects that will be sustainable without our assistance. Therefore, we have tried these years to earn trust from the Bambara people and to help them improve their lives on the most basic level. They must have food and water before they can consider social change. In addition to helping them dig sturdier wells and grow gardens

that are productive year round, the Alliance has instituted a medical program that has trained village health workers who provide superficial treatment, preventative information, and sterile instruments. We have also recently initiated a literacy program that will enable these villagers to learn to read and write their own language for the first time in centuries.

It is our profound hope that these combined projects will be instruments for change to improve the health of all the Bambara people. But change must come from within. And in order for change to occur, fear—including fear of information—must be confronted and overcome. These people, our sisters and brothers, deserve our patience, our love, and our courage to remove the obstacles we unconsciously construct in our own paths.

Kathryn Lindquist  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### *A More Forgiving Perspective*

I had mixed emotions about Marlene Harris Austin's article "Afterthought" (Fall 1992). I could relate to her feeling of isolation during her grief; when I was in graduate school I was hospitalized and never received any contact from the visiting teachers or Relief Society president of my new ward. It hurt me at the time. Now that I'm in the Relief Society presidency myself, I have a more forgiving perspective.

What I have discovered after two years of sitting in presidency meetings is that there is a baseline of suffering going on in any given congregation at any given time. On the surface, our suburban ward seems to have the blessings of Zion scattered upon it, the chapel

filled with beautiful, affluent, talented members. Scratch the veneer, however, and beneath there is divorce, mental illness, desperate health problems, and sudden unemployment. The bishopric announced from the podium this past Sunday that a thirty-one-year-old sister, mother of a toddler, had less than two months to live. She has pancreatic cancer.

After being privy to these often secret sufferings, I wonder if Austin's implied question of "Why don't we help each other more?" is not as appropriate as asking ourselves how even a few people are able to cope with their own sorrows and yet sometimes still continue to pour love from the pitcher. Our Relief Society president, for instance, accepted her overwhelming assignment less than six months after the death of her eight-year-old daughter. For the first year of our presidency, I cannot recall seeing Jolene without a film of tears clouding her eyes. Yet Jolene still managed to convey her sense of caring to those under her stewardship.

Let me stress that Jolene is probably the exception. Most of us, myself included, become extremely dysfunctional when a crisis strikes. We are often walking around in autopilot, hoping we remember to feed ourselves and family members at least a couple times a day. If we hear the whisperings of the Holy Spirit prompting us to call another in need, we feel too exhausted to respond. We may have the desire to serve but unfortunately not the energy. I know that when I was going through a divorce three years ago, a young sister moved into the ward who really needed me to befriend her. I could not do it. My well was dry. I have the wherewithal to make the overtures now, but it's too late, she's already moved away.

And so I would say to Austin that

sometimes a combination of factors in a ward may temporarily render many of the normally responsive Saints inadequate for consistent service. Yes, I agree with her assessment that often people are uncomfortable with grief and unskilled in dealing with ongoing difficulties. But there are some individuals who are blessed with a sense of knowing what to do. It's possible that those members had their spiritual radar temporarily malfunctioning when Austin needed their skills the most. I hope she will be forgiving.

My new insight has helped me to be more understanding when a ward member seems oblivious to the list of current struggles I'm sure must be embossed across my forehead. I am learning that I must sometimes ask for specific deeds of kindness. When other people are distracted by their own straits, it's ineffective to rely on subtle promptings, even holy ones. Even if we shout, some people will not be able to respond.

Should there come a time again when I am not there mentally to answer the door knock of a needy brother or sister, I hope they will give me a second—or even third—chance. I hope they will knock again, loudly.

Kathryn E. Dawson  
Columbus, Ohio

### *More Than a Voice*

I appreciate what Barbara Elliott Snedecor is getting at in her essay, "On Being Female: A Voice of Contentment" (Fall 1992). However, I must strongly disagree with her contention that our Mother in Heaven could or would put down her physical body in order to function in the office of Holy Ghost.

If the Holy Ghost can and does ef-

fectively testify to us of the feelings and thoughts of our Father in Heaven; then it stands to reason that the same Holy Ghost can and does testify to us of the thoughts and feelings of our Mother in Heaven as well. I believe our Mother in Heaven, as well as the eternal companion of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be full, complete, and equal members of the Godhead. As such the office of Holy Ghost would naturally testify of them and convey their feelings to receptive children.

The eternal marriage of our Mother and Father in Heaven is certainly as vital and necessary as are our own eternal marriages. The unique being created by the two of them together is immensely greater than the sum of the two separate persons. I believe the physical aspect of their union to be as important as the emotional and spiritual are to the whole equation. The vitality and the synergy that result from the whole being that they create together requires all aspects of male female relationship to be in order—mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical. For me, this belief precludes the possibility of our Mother in Heaven laying her physical body aside for any purpose. The highest priority is the Oneness of our Gods.

It is my understanding from past research I have done that if one looks into the etymology of the name of God, we find that the name itself represents both the masculine and the feminine. Should we say that our Father is a chauvinist then, or rather should we say that our view of God has been in error? Certainly our Father in Heaven who must honor, cherish, and love his own wife above and beyond all other beings, would not appropriate to himself the whole name of God.

I wonder if the only reason we as a church do not know more about our

Mother in Heaven is because we have not asked. Certainly God's encouragement to, "Ask and it shall be given," "Knock and it shall be opened unto you," or his promise that "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" apply to the desire to know more of our Mother in Heaven as well as any other righteous desire.

One day not too long ago as I was meditating on the subject of our Mother in Heaven, I was suddenly struck by the illuminating idea that as Christ said to the apostles, "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." So then as I have known my own great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, each of whom has exemplified to me what is best in humanity. Then I have known my Mother in Heaven and the love and caring and strength she is capable of. As literal, genetically linked daughters of God, these women—I would also include my own wife here—have drawn for me a tremendously accurate picture of my Mother in Heaven.

Todd Sidwell  
Los Angeles, California

### *Euphoric Anesthesia*

I wish to relate to you two disturbing and frankly embarrassing experiences I have had recently. The first took place on the Washington temple grounds at Christmas time last December. I had looked forward to bringing my non-member friend and significant other to a choral presentation that was being put on by the youth of a local stake, assuming that we would hear one of the beautiful programs Mormon choirs are particularly known for at that time of year. Instead, we got two solid hours of watered-down Christian fundamentalist "feel good" music reminis-

cent of much of the mass-produced Southern Baptist (and, unfortunately, Mormon) sap that is threatening to drive authentic religious music, both gospel and sacred, out of business. But what was worse was the theatrical Pentecostal-like atmosphere. Five teenage girls stepped forward at different points in the program to bear their testimonies of the happiness that Christ had brought them, while the mellow tones of easy listenin' faded to a lull in the background. And all five then proceeded to bawl as if their lives had come to an end.

Meanwhile, three of the boys standing on the top row of the risers collapsed with a thud at various intervals, which only added to the spectacle. And the vapid tones of "chloroform in sound" (to paraphrase an infamous quote by Mark Twain) continued as concerned parents rushed to revive their children. Unfortunately, the prevailing spirit of the evening was one of pleasant euphoric anesthesia bordering on delirium, and not one of thoughtful spiritual sentiment.

My friend was shocked to think what kind of training our children must be getting through the programs of the church, and I was mortified. All I could do was to try to explain to her that that's not really the way it is in an ordinary ward. And yet, unfortunately, I think that's the way it is becoming everywhere, as manifest by the second event, which I would also like to briefly describe.

Just today when I popped in a video cassette of a recently created church-produced film called "Our Heavenly Father's Plan," we were once again inundated with the sickly-sweet tones of Muzak while a young man expressed, in obviously affected tones, how much his life had been changed by the gospel. The

background music was programmed to send that little chill up your spine, so that they wouldn't have to rely too heavily on the text to achieve the same. The message was beautiful, but so insipid when presented in such a trite way! (Incidentally, I know that taste in music varies, and I sincerely believe that any one style of music is as valid as another. But there is such a thing as quality, and the vast majority of laymen and musicians alike would agree that this music is severely lacking in that.)

I would not be so critical if I thought that this was the best we could do. But the original (1960s) BYU production of "Man's Search for Happiness" proved we could do better. And there have been others. "John Baker's Last Race" is also a very good film from that period. These may be what Spencer Kimball had in mind when he expressed his hope that the arts would become better developed among our people. Indeed, "Mormon art" will never be worthy of that title if it fails to reflect our great history and to better define our cultural identity and the motivating forces behind our way of life in ways that cause us to celebrate instead of cringe in embarrassment.

Of the films that have been released in recent years, the only one with any merit whatsoever is "A Rare and Precious Possession." Not one of the others can be watched without one gritting one's teeth and "enduring to the end." And I can't think of much Mormon music of merit since Bradshaw's "Restoration" except for a smattering of nice new hymns and a few organ pieces.

I am appalled at this "feel good" anti-intellectual (or perhaps "anti-art") approach to the gospel that undermines the vital message my ancestors struggled to bring forth and to preserve, and I would be interested to hear others'

views on this disturbing trend in the church.

David Harris  
Washington, D.C.

### *Announcement*

The Case Reports Committee of the Mormon Alliance invites contacts from individuals who feel they have experienced ecclesiastical or spiritual abuse within the context of the LDS church or who know about the experiences of others.

The Mormon Alliance is a new organization to identify, document, and address such problems. Spiritual abuse or injury occurs in a religious system when individuals act without adequate accountability, using position, "special" status, or presumed special understandings of the gospel in ways that violate the agency, injure the spiritual growth, coerce the compliance, damage the self-esteem, and/or demean the dignity of others, whether leaders or members.

The Case Reports Committee invites contact both from those who feel that they have suffered spiritual abuse and also from those who feel that their ecclesiastical leaders have acted nurtur-ingly and protectively in situations where abuse or injury was a possibility. We invite both leaders and members to report their experiences.

We are not interested in church-bashing. Our goals as a committee are: to listen nonjudgmentally and confidentially (We realize that simply being able to talk will be an important step for some people.); to document accurately and responsibly the events that occurred, from multiple perspectives wherever possible; to prepare selected cases for publi-

cation; to promote healing and reconciliation; to help restore faith in God's un-failing love and the Savior's unfailing grace; and to heal breaches of trust within the Mormon community.

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### *Editors' Notes*

Jessie Embry guest-edited the winter 1992 issue of *Dialogue*. We appreciate her work on that issue.

We are pleased to announce the Steven Molen Essay Contest, named in honor of the late student, writer, and son of Ron and Norma Molen. The purpose of the contest is to encourage students and young authors (under thirty years of age) to submit new works analyzing subjects of relevance to Mormons. We hope to print one such essay per issue, beginning with Steven Molen's "The Identity of Jacob's Opponent: Wrestling with Ambiguity in Genesis 32:22-32," which will appear in the summer 1993 issue. Each of the essays selected for publication will receive an award of excellence in the amount of \$250.

Due to rising production costs, as well as the increase in the number of pages comprising each issue, we are announcing a modest increase in the regu-

lar subscription rate from \$25 to \$30 a year, effective 1 January 1993. Rates for students and seniors will hereafter be \$25; rates for foreign subscriptions will be raised proportionately. The journal has raised its rates only twice since its inception twenty-seven years ago. Given that the price of the average American history journal is \$43 per year, we believe that *Dialogue* is still an excellent value at the new subscription rate.

Beginning in 1993, we urge those submitting manuscripts to also subscribe to the journal. While *Dialogue* unquestionably derives benefit from the manuscripts it receives, we believe authors also benefit from the publication of their work. We believe it to be a reasonable request to ask that authors, in return, show their support of the journal by subscribing.

We apologize for the "lost label phenomenon" which resulted in some copies of the winter 1992 issue not reaching subscribers. Since the labels are missing, we do not know who you are.

If you did not receive your winter 1992 issue (volume 25, number 4), please drop us a note or give us a call at 801-363-9988 and we will send you a copy as soon as possible.

Readers will notice that beginning with this issue *Dialogue* has adopted the use of footnotes in article reference citations.

*Dialogue* now has an account with a local securities firm, creating a depository for those wishing to make tax-deductible donations of stocks or other securities and funds. Please contact the editors at 801-363-9988 for details.

As the new editors of *Dialogue*, we sincerely thank all of you who have already given your support to our fledgling effort. The response to our pre-Christmas 1992 fund-raising letter was generous and heart-warming. We also appreciate your manuscripts, suggestions, and words of encouragement. Because of you, we feel well sustained in our new callings.