

LETTERS

The Birch Concern

Some years ago, I let my subscription lapse and got out of the *Dialogue* habit. A month ago a friend told me of Michael Quinn's essay on Elder Benson in the summer 1993 issue and lent me her copy so I could read it. I read it in one sitting.

My wife Carol and I used to live in Washington, D.C., and Carol was on Idaho congressman Ralph Harding's staff. I attended the session of Congress the afternoon Ralph gave his speech of concern about the church becoming linked to the John Birch Society through Elder Benson.

One detail that readers may find interesting is the reaction of our stake president, Milan Smith, who had served as administrative assistant to Elder Benson when he was Secretary of Agriculture. At the end of Ralph's speech, Congressman Ullman from western Oregon asked for the floor. Ullman said something to the effect that he was supporting Ralph's comments on behalf of Mormons in his district.

Ralph looked puzzled and said he didn't know Ullman was going to support his speech. Milan Smith, our stake president, said with a grin, "He's from my old district." Milan added that the speech was very important, that he would personally pay for having it mailed to the leadership of the church.

For the next few weeks, a bipartisan group of young Mormon volunteers gathered and stuffed (maybe 30,000) copies of Ralph Harding's speech into envelopes addressed to church leaders across the United States. The Birch concern ran deep in our stake.

My temple recommend interview gives an indication of the concern in my own ward about Elder Benson's activities. When my bishop asked if I sup-

ported the leadership of the church, I said, "To be frank, I'm upset with Elder Benson's activities." He said, "We all are," and signed my recommend.

Henry L. Miles
Orem, Utah

A Scrutinizing Response

I was surprised that Lavina Fielding Anderson's "The LDS Intellectual Community and Church Leadership: A Contemporary Chronology" (Spring 1993) generated not a single scrutinizing response. Can it be that we in the Mormon intellectual community are slipping into our own comfortable Ensign-like orthodoxy?

With no intention whatsoever of denigrating what I believe to be a constructive effort, I come away with the impression that Anderson is inclined to cast the net a bit wide.

In particular, I am not convinced that the issue of Elder Ronald E. Poelman's altered October 1984 general conference address qualified as a "clash between obedience . . . and . . . conscience" (7). Despite the status this incident achieved among LDS intellectuals, Elder Poelman himself has never to my knowledge given any indication, public or private, that he disagreed with either the substance of the changes or their implementation.

Having listened carefully to both versions of Elder Poelman's address, I cannot agree with the position that, in Jackson Newell's words, Poelman's "ideas were turned inside out" ("An Echo From the Foothills," *Dialogue*, Spring 1986, 27). Although the "before and after" sample cited by Anderson (as well as other examples) appears super-

ficially contradictory, the fact is that the edited version preserved both the tone and substance of the original. Elder Poelman's fundamental message remained unchanged. I see no reason to dismiss the official explanation that the changes aimed to clarify passages which unintentionally bolstered the claims of several fundamentalist splinter groups.

Anderson inadvertently perpetuates the widely-reported myth that a "cough track" was added in retaping to create the illusion of an audience. In fact, there is no "cough track" or other audience-like noise present during the talk itself. There is a rather clumsily added congregational-response "amen" (inserted at the conclusion), the absence of which would have been conspicuous and possibly awkward. It may be bad editing, but it can hardly be considered deception.

Anderson notes that Poelman "did not speak in general conference again for four and a half years," as though this were significant. In fact, Elder Poelman's hiatus from the tabernacle pulpit was very much within the norm for a member of the Seventy. Since October 1984, as least twenty-four general authorities went as long as or longer than Elder Poelman between conference addresses: including Vaughn J. Featherstone (Oct. 1987-Apr. 1992), Rex D. Pinegar (Oct. 1985-Apr. 1990), Gene R. Cook (Oct. 1988-Apr. 1993), Hartman Rector (Oct. 1985-Oct. 1990), and Loren C. Dunn (Oct. 1985-Apr. 1991). Indeed, Elder Poelman would appear to be on a regular rotation with elders John H. Groberg and F. Enzo Busche, both of whom spoke, like him, in October 1984 and not again until April 1989.

N. Dean Meservy
Severn, Maryland

Internal Quality Control

. . . I was disappointed by Lavina Fielding Anderson's failure in the spring 1993 issue to comprehend that an employee has a duty not to distribute an employer's proprietary information (including early drafts of documents) to the public (see pp. 15-16). The church is (gratefully) not a government institution subject to the Freedom of Information Act or the Government in Sunshine acts. The public (including church members) do not have a right to be involved in the intimate details of every decision made in Salt Lake City. This would place the church's leadership and employees in the impossible position of acting without failure. To my knowledge, the church has never promulgated the doctrine of infallibility. In fact, I read our teachings to allow individuals to make mistakes so that they (and others) may learn and grow.

It would be impossible for me to function as an attorney who drafts complicated commercial contracts which are translated into multiple languages if I could not review drafts with clients and modify these drafts to make substantive changes and address cultural nuances before disclosure to the other parties at the bargaining table. Does Ms. Anderson expect church leaders to automatically produce initial drafts of documents upon which no improvements or modifications can be made after internal review? I find it refreshing to learn that the church appears to have an internal quality control program (which Ms. Anderson apparently views as censorship) which should not only improve an author's work product but also make it less susceptible to unintended cultural bias. Why should the church, which is managed by men and women with human frailties, not have

the right to keep early drafts of documents confidential so that its internal communications and work product can be improved? . . .

Douglas B. Whiting
San Diego, California

Anderson Responds

I appreciate the points raised by the above two letters. Dean Meservy's observation that the revision of Elder Poelman's talk does not constitute a "clash between obedience . . . and . . . conscience" merits discussion. It is quite true that Elder Poelman has remained silent. We simply do not know whether he agreed or disagreed with the editing of his talk.

However, given the usual procedure for generating conference talks, it seems probable to me that Elder Poelman's talk as delivered represented his own carefully considered thoughts. Let me describe that procedure.

During the time that I worked at the *Ensign* (1973-81), assignments for conference talks were made several weeks in advance of conference and finished texts were ready at least two weeks in advance. Before the first session began, the editors had checked all of the quotations, done what (usually very light) editing was required, consulted with the authors about any problems or questions that had emerged during the editing process, and typeset the talks. At the same time, the translators were preparing delivery texts in their target languages for simultaneous translation.

During delivery, we followed each talk as broadcast on television word for word, making note of even the minutest changes, and replaying the simultane-

ously produced audio-taped versions to transcribe last-minute departures of more than a word or two. These changes were rare—nearly always a sentence or two at the introduction to welcome a new general authority, express love for the prophet, etc., or inadvertent misstatements or stumbling over a word or phrase.

I am assuming that this same procedure was still in place in 1984, although I could of course be mistaken. If it was, Elder Poelman did not jot down a few hasty notes on an ill-thought-out topic on the back of an envelope before he delivered "The Gospel and the Church."

Meservy's mention of "listen[ing] carefully" to both versions adds a valuable piece of information. I have not listened to either version and appreciate knowing that there was no "cough track." That information came from Peggy Fletcher ("Poelman Revises Conference Speech," *Sunstone* 10 [1]: 44). I regret its omission from my documentation of the event (23n43). Meservy's analysis of speaking frequencies since October 1984 is also valuable and much appreciated. The change from three days of conference sessions to two days, which began in April 1977, meant that all Seventies were heard from much less frequently.

But I disagree that "the edited version preserved both the tone and substance of the original" and invite interested readers to make the comparison for themselves by reading the parallel columns version published in *Sunstone* 14 (Oct. 1990): 50-53. For a general authority's talk to be edited to this extent was simply unprecedented in my years at the *Ensign*.

Douglas B. Whiting's comments about the need to maintain confidentiality over documents in the draft stage is

one with which I certainly agree. In light of my description of the editing process described above, it will become apparent, however, that manuscripts delivered to the *Ensign* were far beyond the “draft” stage. They were given to us only at the stage when they were considered finished documents, ready for the time-consuming and expensive process of editing and typesetting. Although changes could be and were made during the editing process, they were rare. Furthermore, I think it is important to distinguish between the manuscript I *thought* I was copying and the manuscript I *actually* copied.

The manuscript I thought I was copying was the delivery text which Elder Rector had read before live television cameras and a live audience. Thousands of people heard what he had said. It cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered a confidential document after delivery.

The manuscript which I actually copied was not the delivery text but an earlier draft—an example of those rare pre-delivery changes. Because it was so rare for texts to be altered during the editing process, I simply took the bottom copy from Elder Rector’s pigeon-hole, assuming it was the delivery text. If I had known it was not the delivery text, I would not have copied it. I regret that I did so, and I accept full responsibility for my actions.

I appreciate this opportunity to clarify the points raised by these letters and welcome further questions, comments, information, or corrections. The question of the essay’s accuracy should have had a much higher priority, in my opinion, than it was during the September 1993 excommunications.

At a fireside on 20 November 1993 in Provo, Utah, where I participated on a panel, one of the written questions

submitted by the audience read: “At a recent lecture on the ‘history of apostasy’ at BYU, a professor of Near Eastern studies, while taking questions on recent events, said that he, and many others, doubted the accuracy of your article on instances of spiritual abuse. When I challenged him for examples, he stated that ‘quite a few’ of those named or made reference to in your article had publicly challenged your presentation of events. While not intending to question your integrity, I wish to ask—is any of that true? Would you now alter your allegations in any particular?”

For the record, here are the sum total of “errors” that have come to my attention. On p. 44, “Frederick W. Voros” should have been W. Frederic Voros. One individual, whose stake president was named, said he had not given me permission to use the president’s name. Louis Midgley complained in private correspondence over the summer and, this fall on Mormon-L, that I had misrepresented his position. With my permission, he posted that correspondence, including my invitation to him to take advantage of the “Letters to the Editors” column in *Dialogue* to represent his own position. As of this writing, he has submitted no letter to *Dialogue’s* editors. All three “errors” were brought to my attention privately, although Midgley has since taken his complaint to a more public forum.

I repeat my cordial invitation for those with clarifications and corrections to contact me directly.

Lavina Fielding Anderson
Salt Lake City, Utah

Get a Life

I enjoyed the articles on Brigham Young University written by Omar Kader and Paul Richards in the fall 1993 issue. Mormons take themselves so seriously!

I've graduated from BYU twice. I found my undergraduate program of experience somewhat stifling and my graduate experience to be extremely liberating.

In many areas with regard to BYU policy (e.g., dress standards), my opinion is that if you can't tolerate it, leave. Private institutions should have some say over the atmosphere they want to create. However, in areas such as freedom of speech, my opinion is that change is needed. We in the church supposedly believe in modern revelation and therefore change. Freedom of speech helps us be more committed to our beliefs because we have examined them or it lets us know which beliefs it is time to let go of.

Another observation: A segment of church members always wants to draw the box smaller and smaller with regard to what is "right." I guess they feel safe to express what I believe is a minority view because they are "righteous." I'm amazed at the things some BYU graduates get enraged about (as judged by *BYU Magazine's* letters to the editor). I want to say, "Get a life."

But I certainly cannot cast the first stone. As Paul Richards mentioned, BYU and church leaders seldom get letters from moderates or liberals. In my wards, people probably think I'm a sweet, shy thing. The reality is that I've decided it's less hassle to keep my mouth shut on Sundays. Voicing my opinion on occasion would probably help a fair number of other people feel that they not alone.

Dialogue serves that purpose for me. Your journal is a breath of fresh air to my beliefs. Most of all I love the fact that it demonstrates that people who share the same faith need not be unthinking clones.

Sharadon Smith
Penang, Malaysia

Nauvoo Polygamists

Lawrence Foster should be complimented for his essay in the winter 1993 issue of *Dialogue*, "The Psychology of Religious Genius." Here Foster brings to individual leaders the same vigorous research which he applied to innovative religious groups in his 1981 award-winning book, *Religion and Sexuality*.

Given the precise nature of his documentation, it is worth noting the absence of a source for his discussion of early Mormon polygamy on page 9 where he states that Joseph Smith "put enormous pressure on unwilling associates" and that "as many as thirty of his closest associates had taken plural wives under his influence." At a Mormon History Association session in May 1993, which Foster attended, I presented some preliminary findings on the incidence of Nauvoo polygamy, including a list of thirty male polygamists during Joseph Smith's lifetime. This demographic study appears in my essay in this issue of *Dialogue*. In a recent conversation, Foster wondered if that number wasn't "in the air." To my knowledge there exists no other source for the number thirty Nauvoo polygamists contemporary with Joseph Smith.

George D. Smith
San Francisco