

## LETTERS

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### *Population Control*

Donald Gibbon (in "Famine Relief, the Church, and the Environment," Summer 1995) notes that a "common condemnation of Mormons is that they ignore the ticking of the 'population bomb' by encouraging large families." He then states: "If we could show that if the world were well organized it could feed itself, we would do a great deal to enhance our acceptability among mainstream environmental thinkers . . ."

That "if the world were well organized it could feed itself" needs no showing—even to most mainstream environmental thinkers—so long as it is clear that population stabilization is part of a "well organized" world. With larger families the world may feed itself in the short run (thirty or sixty years?), but not longer. (Even if the impossible were granted, and the world could be "well organized" while population continued to increase rapidly, mainstream environmentalists would still be appalled by the reduction in habitat for plants and animals and the accompanying high rate of extinction.)

World population is increasing at 100 million per year *even though enormous efforts are being made to discourage large families*. Many billions of dollars each year are used to provide free family planning services, radio and television ads, etc.; in China there are strong economic incentives for those who stop at one child. And still, at the present rate of growth, world population will double in forty years. Without the ongoing massive efforts to reduce family size, population doubling times would be shorter. Although some demographers forecast eventual population stabilization,

they assume even more funding for encouraging smaller families. If more land were brought into production, less grain were fed to animals, and food were produced more efficiently (and potential problems such as global warming, ozone depletion, and energy shortages did not materialize), there could be food for more people. But for how many more? For twice the population (forty years)? For four times the population (eighty years)? For eight times the population (120 years)?

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### *Joseph Smith's Successor*

I was surprised at the fundamentalist approach Richard Van Wagoner took towards the 1844 transfiguration of Brigham Young in the winter 1995 issue. He allowed only two options: either Brigham Young was a *Star Trek* shape shifter who morphed into Joseph Smith or there were no spiritual manifestations experienced by anyone. My great-great-grandfather William Adams who was there states that he heard Joseph Smith's voice from Brigham Young but makes no mention of a physical transformation. In a January 1894 letter he wrote,

William Marks, president of the stake, called the meeting to order and took charge of the meeting. After the opening exercises [Sidney] Rigdon spoke of his claim as guardian to young Joseph [III], showing the necessity of the office, which took between one half to one hour.

There was a great multitude attending the meeting; more than one half the crowd could not find seats,

and stood on their feet. Never were so many at one meeting that I ever saw. I was sitting down and could not see the speakers on the stand. I was listening very attentively, so that I could hear every word.

I heard a voice speaking; I was surprised, and jumped to my feet, expecting Joseph the Prophet was speaking, having heard him often in public and private, so that I was acquainted with his voice. This was a strong testimony that the Twelve Apostles were the rightful leaders of the church, and that the mantle of Joseph had fallen on Brigham Young. Out of that vast multitude about twenty voted for Rigdon to be guardian of young Joseph until he should come of age, he then being a boy of ten or eleven years of age.

While the spiritual manifestation could have become enlarged to mythological proportions over time, I believe that at least some people such as William Adams heard Joseph Smith's voice and were convinced that Brigham Young was Joseph Smith's successor. I don't believe that they were fooled by Brigham Young theatrics in which he did a Rich Little impression of Joseph Smith.

Neil J. Andersen  
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### *More on the Church in Italy*

Congratulations on another good issue of *Dialogue* (Spring 1996). Readers have probably already noted that there is at least one typographical error in my essay, "LDS Prospects in Italy for the Twenty-first Century" (where a portion of the sentence was deleted). On page 147 the last sentence of the first full paragraph should read:

Introvigne identified La Civiltà Cattolica's most obvious inaccuracies and documented the anonymous author(s)' reliance on the 1995 anti-Mormon diatribe of Pier Angelo Gramaglia,<sup>38</sup> even though more responsible descriptions of Mormonism were available in Italian.

I was mistaken when in footnote 17 I wrote that "many nominal or disaffected Catholics prefer to designate one of these non-Catholic churches [Seventh-Day Adventists and Assemblies of God] or even the State Charity Fund." In fact, many nominal or disaffected Catholics prefer to designate the non-Catholic churches *rather than* the State Charity Fund. Italians are highly suspicious of the State Charity Funds, particularly in the context of the "mani pulite" scandal which resulted in the downfall of the Christian Democratic Party. As such, a very small percentage of taxpayers designates the State Charity Funds.

Finally, I hope it is clear that only a very small minority of disaffected Catholics align themselves with new religious movements (NRMs). This disaffection has more to do with the secular influences of society and very little to do with NRMs. Nevertheless, NRMs have benefitted because the secular-based society seems more willing to protect non-Catholic religious rights than was the case when Catholicism was the official state religion. I understand that in some other European countries (in particular France, Germany, and Spain) there has been legislation proposed which attempts to limit the activities of minority religions. This has not yet occurred in Italy.

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### *Science, God, and the Big Bang*

I was fascinated by the content of the spring 1996 issue and the quality of the articles included. Armand Mauss, as guest editor, is to be recommended for what he brought together. As a long-time reader and subscriber of *Dialogue* (since Vol. 1, No. 1), I am happy that *Dialogue* still arrives in a reasonably timely manner each season of the year with many stimulating and informative articles. But the spring issue of this year was outstanding.

I was especially intrigued by David Bailey's article, "Science and Mormonism: Past, Present, Future," and noted his comment on the "big bang" cosmological theory on the origin and evolution of the universe. He asks, "How can the notion of a finite age universe be accommodated in LDS doctrine, which has historically taught that matter is eternal?" This is the same question raised by Keith Norman in his article, "Mormon Cosmology, Can It Survive the Big Bang?" in the January 1986 issue of *Sunstone*.

I would refer both to a comment by Mortimer J. Adler in his book *How to Think About God* (1980), where he writes:

"Unfortunately, they [the scientists who discuss the evidence for the "big bang" theory of the origin of the cosmos] are not equally precise in their handling of such words as 'beginning' and 'end.' When they speak of the world's having a beginning, do they mean (a) that the *observable* cosmos as we know it and as it has developed up to the present moment came into existence at a prior time which we can estimate as being so many billion years ago; or do they mean (b) that the cosmos came into existence out of nothing so many billion years ago, before which time nothing ex-

isted? An examination of the most carefully written scientific treatments . . . will discover that the big bang theory does not posit an absolute beginning of the cosmos—a coming into existence out of nothing—but only *an initial event in the development of the cosmos as we now know it, . . .*

"Our present techniques of observation and measurement, and the technical facilities they employ, do not permit us to penetrate the past beyond the time, some fifteen to twenty billion years ago, when the big bang occurred. What is being said here is not that past time is limited (finite rather than infinite), but that our knowledge of past time is limited—limited to a time beyond which our observations and measurements cannot go. *Time may extend back infinitely beyond that initial explosion of matter, . . .* but unless some radical alteration in our techniques and instruments of observation and measurement occurs, we will never be able to penetrate the veil that hides that infinite past from us.

"Similarly, . . . what is being said is *not* that nothing existed before the event, for otherwise there would have been nothing to explode and start the universe (as we know it) off on the course of its development. The fact that the cosmos, as we know it, began to develop then *does not mean that nothing existed before that development started*. Science may never be able to tell us about the state of the cosmos in the time before that event. We are hardly justified in interpreting the silence of science as a negative answer to the questions about the pre-existence of the cosmos" (32-34; my emphasis).

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