

LETTERS

Language Usage vs. Moral Values

With respect to Douglas Campbell's article on hymns in the summer 1996 issue, in his Example 16 ("In our words and looks and actions lie the seeds of death and life") he suggests that "looks" was changed because we no longer think ourselves morally accountable for our appearance. But I believe looks there does not refer to appearance, but rather to outlook. My dictionary gives as one of the meanings of look "to direct or pay attention" and as another meaning "to expect or look forward to." We used to say, "He is looking to do good" and "You must look out for yourself" or "Look to your own interests."

If I am right, the change from looks to thoughts merely follows language usage, rather than reflects a change in moral values.

"If You Could Hie to Kolob" says, "there is no end to race." In context I think it means there is no end to mankind, the human race, but it is susceptible to meaning that the several races of mankind are immutable. To avoid that possible misunderstanding, I have suggested to the church music committee changing either that last clause to "nor to the human race" or "there is no end to grace" or substituting another rhyme for "space/race."

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Challenging Conventional Thinking

I read with great interest Dynette Reynolds's "Youth, Sex, and Coercion: The Neglect of Sexual Abuse Factors in LDS Data and Policy on Premarital Sex" in the summer 1996 issue not

only because Dynette is a friend, but because her topic is in one venue of my long-time research interest—the origins and evolution of Christian sexual ethics.

Dynette raises important issues. I hope she has opened a few eyes. The church's handling of sexual issues is appallingly uneven, often ignorant, and/or erotophobic. Sadly, well-intentioned but bungling local leaders sometimes increase the emotional and spiritual harm that usually accompanies sexual abuse, especially when victims are children.

I was shocked to read, however, statements that can only add to the church's confusion and to the pain of those who have been sexually abused. While trying to enlighten us, Dynette herself seems to fall victim to convolution regarding sexual purity.

She writes: "(It will be obvious that the numbers of young Mormons voluntarily disregarding church teachings on premarital sex are almost certainly lower than currently estimated.)"

In what sense can we *involuntarily disregard* church teachings on premarital sex? I can think of none. A person (whether a child or an adult) who is the victim of nonconsensual sexual acts does not by any perambulation disregard church teachings on premarital or extramarital sex. The concept of involuntary disregard of church teachings implies that victims must somehow bear guilt for what happened to them.

I know that Dynette doesn't believe that. Yet that is precisely the inescapable burden her rhetoric places on them.

We should be nonetheless grateful that Dynette has called major flaws in some studies to our attention, flaws that I suspect exist in almost all sur-

veys on premarital sex. In light of Dynette's excellent analysis of the Heaton and Chadwick-Top studies, we would be well advised to question data based on answers to questions involving ill-defined terms. I wouldn't myself know what the instrument meant by "involved in" or "premarital sex." I would imagine that some whose only involvement was involuntary would reply in the negative, while others having identical experience might reply affirmatively.

I'm not competent to judge the validity of Dynette's use of national data on sex abuse to adjust Heaton and Chadwick-Top data, but find it ingenious and thought provoking. Whatever, surely Dynette has her finger on something very important.

Finally, a quibble. I think Dynette is a little glib in accepting the assumption that boys are less frequent victims of sexual abuse than girls. This almost universally accepted assertion is, as far as I can tell, utterly without meaningful evidence. I suspect that at the very least sexual abuse of boys is much higher than any data now show. Perhaps attention to sexual abuse of boys will be the coming fad.

Whatever remaining faults we Latter-day Saints have in our approaches to sex, I feel quite strongly that we live in a generally healthier time than our forebears. At least we are beginning to discuss sexual ethics more openly, to acknowledge and address such problems as Dynette calls to our attention. Thank you, Dynette, for challenging conventional thinking.

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Evan Stephens and D. Michael Quinn

D. Michael Quinn's "case study" on "male-male intimacy" in the winter 1995 issue is a triumph of imagination over evidence. He infers a hidden homosexual component in the life and friendships of Evan Stephens, pioneer LDS musician and composer, and even suggests, without a trace of evidence, that church authorities condoned this. Why? Primarily because Stephens did not marry and was known to befriend and allow young men to board in his home from time to time while he fostered their academic and professional careers—or preferred, appropriately, to have a male traveling companion rather than to travel alone. Quinn's "evidence" is entirely circumstantial. He claims to have the "eyes to see" a "homoromantic and homoerotic sub-text." Relying on suggestion and strained interpretations of written sources, Quinn's article becomes to me a "case study" in the use of innuendo to vilify the dead. I prefer to rely on the judgment of people who knew Stephens.

The essential problem with Quinn's article is that it grossly misrepresents Stephens and other honorable men. If we were to believe his premise, he would make us interpret them as without integrity, insincere, and hypocritical, leading deceptive lives inconsistent with their public bearing—unfaithful to wives, families, friends, and to strict standards of fidelity and chastity required by their religion.

Quinn distorts Joseph Smith's views, claiming that having "same sex bedmates" was "advocated by the Mormon prophet." Quoting Joseph, he writes the prophet believed it acceptable for "friends to lie down to-

gether, locked in the arms of love, to sleep and wake in each other's embrace" (HC, 5:361). The language Quinn cites is from a funeral sermon on the resurrection, where Joseph advocated that family and friends should be buried near each other if possible, lying down in nearby graves, so that they may wake at the resurrection to rejoice together and embrace in celebration of God's goodness and love. He is referring to family members who *are* our dearest friends, and describing a scene of intense family joy. The "arms of love" is a scriptural allusion—the imagery of godly love as the Lord extends it at the resurrection and otherwise (see 2 Ne. 1:15; D&C 6:20, etc.). Similarly, he quotes George Q. Cannon out of context to give the impression that he advocated "male-male intimacy."

I am deeply concerned also about the way Quinn discusses Samuel Bailey Mitton. True, Mitton met Stephens in his youth and came to greatly admire him, his achievements, and his music. They had an abiding friendship; hence Quinn would have us assume that he was one of Stephens's "boy chums." From my own knowledge of Mitton's life and circumstances, I know this idea to be categorically false. Fortunately, there are many still alive who knew Mitton, including his children, grandchildren, and other friends. In addition, his life may be the best documented of anyone mentioned in the essay. He left numerous letters, a journal of many volumes, a taped oral history, and hundreds of poems, songs, hymns, and anthems, all of which make clear his values. These primary sources do not support Quinn's hypothesis. Yet Quinn seeks to implicate Mitton by clever sugges-

tion as he does others.

I see no indication that Quinn made any attempt to interview people who knew Stephens or his friends for first-hand knowledge of them or their characters. Before his death in 1954, I spent hundreds of hours chatting with Samuel Mitton about his life and values, and heard him discuss his feelings, experiences, and the people he remembered—including Evan Stephens. Quinn's idea is preposterous and wholly inconsistent with Mitton's character and with his understanding of Stephens. Mitton's conduct and conversation were chaste and honest. He possessed an innocence of mind seldom seen today, and certainly not in evidence in Quinn's discussion. Mitton was greatly devoted to his wife, seven children, and large extended family (see V. L. Lindblad, *Biography of Samuel Bailey Mitton* [1965]). The affectionate and sensitive love letters of his courtship were known to Quinn but were ignored. Mitton's own sexual orientation is obvious by these and the many tender poems and songs he wrote for his wife throughout their sixty-six years together. His priorities are declared by his long and faithful church service as missionary, high councilor, choir director, organist, temple worker, and patriarch.

Why did Stephens never marry? Quinn correctly notes that Stephens was reluctant to speak about it. This agrees with what Samuel Mitton told me—that on several occasions he asked Stephens, and that he always avoided the question with a witty response. But Stephens's reticence is not evidence, and there are many reasons persons remain unmarried. Quinn does not mention that Stephens's recent biographer devotes an entire chapter to the question, reviewing

credible explanations (see R. L. Bergman, *The Children Sang: The Life and Music of Evan Stephens with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir* [1992], ch. 9). An early and very detailed recollection says Stephens was once deeply in love and engaged to a young woman who died and left him in extreme grief, having first received his promise that he would love her through his music (*ibid.*, 186). These matters cry out for more than a simplistic assumption. Quinn's readers are not even informed that there are alternative explanations for his single life. Bergman, who spent two and one half years studying Stephens's life, says that he was heterosexual and that Quinn's "speculations . . . besmirch the reputation of an honorable man" (*Logan [Utah] Herald Journal*, 10 Apr. 1996, 18).

Quinn is very creative in finding homosexual allusions. Common terms and expressions of the day carry a sexual implication according to him. Likely Stephens is vulnerable to Quinn's approach because of Stephens's naivete on such matters, innocently expressing his native sincerity and simplicity, and his lasting and affectionate bonds of friendship—true and chaste brotherly love. Such admired qualities abound in the recollections of him by friends, associates, and church leaders, which contain no hint of unchaste behavior. I have read many of these comments. Quinn has not given any evidence whatsoever that Stephens's contemporaries, who knew his personality, ever suspected or imagined unchaste conduct.

Quinn makes much of an occurrence during a concert of Stephens's music in 1902, claiming that Stephens's "same-sex love song" was presented. But the account of it did not say it was by Stephens. Quinn assumes this.

Actually, the verse quoted is a quatrain from the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, known to all at the time, as it is today, as most certainly a heterosexual expression. It was used to introduce two of Stephens's duets for a man and woman, expressing the "unrequited love" of parted heterosexual friends, songs that probably reflect Stephens's own loss in the death of his fiancée in his youth.

Stephens carefully cultivated "public relations" as evidenced in the letters he wrote to the newspaper when he was away from home. It is most unreasonable for Quinn to suggest that he peppered his published works with homosexual allusions or that editors allowed them to run, when the writings were directed to the church and public on which he was dependent for his livelihood and recognition, and where such allusions would have been shocking to the moral sensibilities of the community. It never would have occurred to Stephens nor his friends that his words could be misconstrued in Quinn's way. Considered in their entirety, his writings and music convey an exemplary innocence.

Stephens's care of young people is actually strong evidence of his fidelity and chastity. Along with the faithful woman who served as his housekeeper for thirty years, a number of young men, and some young women, boarded in his nurturing home while attending school or college. They helped care for the large home and gardens, and they often received their board and his assistance with school expenses. The housekeeper greatly admired Stephens, and would have been the first to know and be offended by anything irregular. These youth came from LDS fami-

lies taught standards of chastity, and it would be absurd to think that Stephens abused a whole series of them without anyone ever reporting it. He came to love them like a father, and this appears to have been his substitute for a family relationship. He referred to them as his "boys" and "girls" in public and in print.

Quinn admits that the "boys" married and had children. Stephens was a beloved avuncular figure who kept in touch with and visited the families and was proud of their achievements. They included two doctors, a dentist, a lawyer and judge, a mission president and public official, musicians, and successful businessmen. They and their families all seem to have retained great respect for Stephens. Harold H. Jensen, who knew Stephens and his youthful friends, was one "of numerous boys Professor Stephens' influence and life inspired to greater ambition." Jensen said that "great he was in stature, music and in heart. Few had the sympathetic understanding of youth as did he. Although . . . father of none he was father to all," adding that "many boys would not have fulfilled missions" but for Stephens (*The Instructor*, Dec. 1930, 721-22). What church leaders thought may be typified in the praise from Elder John A. Widtsoe, who knew him for many years: "A lovable character . . . kind, tolerant, a true friend who practiced the obligations of friendship." And the apostle noted that "He loved to seek out young men and become their helper and, as it were, their second father [in] numerous acts of God-like charity . . ." (*Millennial Star* 92 [11 Dec. 1930]: 856).

What was the sexual orientation of Stephens's "boys"? Despite all of

Quinn's suggestions, there is not a scrap of evidence that any of them had anything but a heterosexual orientation. Consider the one to whom Quinn devotes the most attention, Stephens's nephew who came from Idaho to board with him and attend LDS University. Harold Jensen referred to him as "put in the way of success by Professor Stephens," and remembered him as "a blonde Viking who captured the eye of everyone as a superb specimen of manhood" (*The Instructor*, Dec. 1930, 722). Why, from that, should we infer that he had homosexual tendencies? Quinn found his photograph in the college yearbook for 1914, and he was a handsome and mature looking man. He was also a popular and active student, having been in the debating club and a class officer and president. The caption, like that of other students, has a lighthearted comment: "Aye, every inch a king," and "Also a 'Queener'" (*The S Book* [1914], 12, 38).

Quinn writes that the term "Queen" was "slang for male homosexual by the 1920s." But the term is "Queener," not "Queen." What did this word mean to students at the university in 1914? According to a student publication when Stephens's nephew was there, the term referred to someone who courted girls, as in: "Pretty girls in the class can be found there galore,/ Rhada, Marion, and Daphne, and some dozens more./ If you wished to advantage their 'Queeners' to see/ Just peep in the Library at two forty-three." The context clearly shows the pairing of men and women (*The Gold and Blue* [Commencement Number, 1912], 47). The same publication's alumni column later recalled the nephew as "the idol of all the girls" (Apr. 1916, 291). All

this agrees with more general studies that in colleges, circa 1915, "queen" as a verb meant "To go on a date or escort a girl" and "queener" was "A ladies man" (H. Wentworth and S. Flexner, *Dictionary of American Slang* [1960], 415; compare usage at Stanford University where "Those students who find time to court the women are called 'queeners'" [*American Speech* 4 (Oct. 1931—Aug. 1932): 436]).

Nevertheless, Quinn uses "Queener" as a basis to launch into a striking discussion of things homosexual, thus creating a strong impression in the reader when there is really no such connection with Stephens and his nephew. He does this repeatedly. Thus, in 1916, Stephens wrote the newspaper at Salt Lake City a long and remarkable description of the musical scene from "Gay New York" (*Deseret Evening News*, 11 Nov. 1916, sec. 2, p. 3). Quinn's citation of this could be used to imply that Stephens used this phrase when it was the headline writer who wrote "Gay." Yet it is an apt term for the musical events described—in the basic sense of "Gay" which then had no homosexual connotation (*Webster's Word Histories* [1989], 90). "Gay New York" has been a cliché, at least since the 1896 Broadway musical *In Gay New York* with its title song. Yet the term affords Quinn the opportunity for another ultimately irrelevant sexual discussion. Again, an innocent stroll through Central Park becomes "homosexual cruising" by Stephens—a claim disgusting and ab-

surd to anyone who has read the full letter in context. Stephens's hotel is within a few blocks of a known homosexual bathhouse and another raided years before! But what has this to do with Stephens, whose hotel is central and within walking distance of the musical performances he has come to hear? Finally Quinn has Stephens living with his nephew near Greenwich Village since the "boy" lived there later with his wife. Yet Quinn offers no supporting evidence for Stephens's residence there but instead uses this assertion to open a discussion of homosexuality near the Village. This is not history, for there is no demonstrable connection with Stephens in any of these instances or in other examples that I could cite. Much of Quinn's evidence does not stand up to even casual scrutiny.

It is not enough that Quinn has inserted protective disclaimers here and there which amount to "maybe it ain't so after all." Not when the overwhelming bulk of his article is couched in a confident, self-assured style, with stark language and imagery designed to leave a vivid and lasting impression. I have tried to write as dispassionately as possible, but Quinn's article is inaccurate and greatly abusive and hurtful to the families and friends of those discussed. Whether written maliciously or not, the result is the same.

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