

## LETTERS

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### *A Small Price to Pay*

In the rather rambling "My 'Word of Wisdom Blues'" (Summer 1997), Garth N. Jones rationalizes his use of tea, wine, and beer by employing his "fair share of intelligence" which God "expects you to use" (63). This, he assumes, is a far superior course than mere obedience to the Word of Wisdom (and how it has been interpreted by the Brethren). Heaven forbid that "Blind faith" push him "into the pits of disaster" (63)!

Yet if we are to accept Jones's thesis, the entire concept of obedience becomes meaningless and we are left adrift on a sea of individual opinions. All commandments, all rules and laws then become subject to the dictates of the individual, and, of course, those dictates will much more often than not flatter that individual's selfishness and greed. Said philosopher Bertrand Russell in *Unpopular Essays*: "We believe, first and foremost, what makes us feel that we are fine fellows" (82).

One of the major purposes of having an institutionalized church is to do away with the anarchy of opinions and introduce elements of stability. The concept of obedience in this context has meaning: we submit to a force greater than ourselves even when we are not completely in agreement. Perhaps some of us will die earlier because we haven't had our daily glass of red wine or green tea, but that is a small price to pay for the privilege to obey God.

Kent R. Bean  
Lehi, Utah

### *What's the Point?*

Regarding the fictional "An Episode from the Memoirs of Elder Thomas, A Somewhat Less than Good and Faithful Servant," by Mark Goldrup, in the summer 1997 issue.

Just about everyone knows that zealous LDS missionaries and their leaders can be insensitive and even stupid at times, and that to so indicate risks being labeled "a less than good and faithful servant." But what's the point?

The same can be said about the editors of *Dialogue*. Maybe that's the point!

Anyway, you folks must be really desperate for material to fill the pages of your journal.

Kenneth W. Taylor  
Los Osos, California

### *Nineteenth-century Women's Roles*

In reading a recent issue of *Dialogue*, I simultaneously found in my files the minutes of Toquerville, Utah's, first Relief Society for 1870 to 1877. *Dialogue's* articles on woman's role in the church caused me to take a second look at the following minutes.

1873 May the 8th Our annual meeting was opened by singing, and Prayer by Sarah M. Willis, afterwards we cut out and arranged materials for two quilts, Bishop J. T. Willis also met with us and gave us some good instructions, we concluded to drop the word Female with reference to our "Relief Society" according to suggestion. The Bishop then asked the members if they were still willing to sustain their president

Sarah M Willis and her counsels Mrs. Fanny Spilsbury & Mrs. A. Higbee and all the other officers in their callings & received a hearty response — The Bishop dismissed by prayer and adjourned until the 23rd instant.

Officers at this date May 8th—

President-	Sarah M. Willis
1st Counsellor-	Fanny Spilsbury
2nd "	Ann Higbee
Secretary	Annis Jackson
Treasurer	Ann Higbee
Teachers	Sister Ermina Hill & Sister A Savage
"	Sister Sarah Stapley Jr & Sister Barbara Lang
"	Sister Ann Kleinman & Sister Encora Batty
"	Sister Lorina Dodge & Sister Bagley
Deacons,	Mary Dodge, Jane Steel & Kate Spilsbury Char- lotte Higbee & Hannah Batty, Echo Sevy & Ann Duffing Lucind Green & Mary Forsyth

May 22nd The Sisters met in the early part of the day, and quilted two quilts & prepared the patchwork for another quilt, we had a *pic nic* & all felt well

President Sarah Melissa Dodge Willis, a strong and energetic woman, was the wife of Bishop Joshua T. Willis. First counselor Fanny Spilsbury and her husband, George, were community leaders, George a skilled builder and stockman. The stature of both families can be measured by the fact that they located at the head of the irrigation ditch system. Second counselor Ann Grainger Carr Higbee was the third plural wife of John Somers Higbee, former bishop of the 19th Ward at Winter Quarters and founding president of the settlement at Provo. Ann worked a number of years in Bringham's general store. The three women were among the town's

social leaders.

It is obvious that direction for the Relief Society was given by the bishop and that basic control was through the male priesthood.

Ann Higbee, trained in accounting, played a dual role as counselor and treasurer. There is the inference that the local group needed tight supervision.

The hierarchical arrangement and designation as *Teachers* and *Deacons* suggest an equivalent of the Aaronic priesthood.

The ladies enjoyed the socialization of the "*pic nic*," a rare outlet for women's time in this pioneer survival period. All were busy mothers with large families. Sara Willis, for example, had fifteen children.

Wesley Larsen  
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### *Learning from Our Polygamous Past*

I was amazed (and disappointed) when I opened my fall 1997 *Dialogue* to read the letter by Brother Hoins entitled "Was He or Wasn't He?" I realize that the subtitle for *Dialogue* is "A Journal of Mormon Thought," but I wasn't counting on such bigoted Mormon thoughts creeping into an issue of *Dialogue*. I guess Brother Hoins doesn't strike me as the typical *Dialogue* subscriber. It is interesting, however, to know this point of view still exists.

I don't understand the need that some other heterosexuals seem to have to demean and belittle those who don't share their sexual preference. Brother Hoins referenced obviously biased seventeen-year-old research

to categorize homosexuals as an immoral and disgusting group of people. Preconceived beliefs may determine what can be seen in those who differ. I'm reminded of the title of Dr. Jeffery R. Jensen's 1997 Washington, D.C., Sunstone presentation, "We See What We Believe: The Heterosexualization of the LDS Church" (full text available on the internet at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/9156/WSWWB.HTM>). We heterosexuals, and Mormon heterosexuals in particular, seek to make everyone just like us. If we fail in this attempt, our last resort tends to make the actions of others who don't fit our way of life appear grotesque and inhumane.

This scenario reminds me of portions of our Mormon history which some would like to ignore. A little over 100 years ago, Mormons didn't believe in the same system of marriage that the rest of the country did. Some non-Mormon people felt as Brother Hoins does—people who are not like us (Mormons in this case) must be changed. If they won't immediately change, then their lifestyle should be distorted and debased even though nothing that they do in the privacy of their own bedrooms adversely affects the rights or threatens the personal lifestyles of others.

Didn't Mormons feel persecuted and pressured to conform when government and society dictated to them what was sexually acceptable in regards to polygamy in the nineteenth century? Why do Mormons now want to regulate what relationships are permissible between consenting adults? Why encourage an environment where government and society determine for everyone what is acceptable and where those going against the

norm are considered immoral and strange? George Santayana said, "Those who disregard the past are bound to repeat it." Perhaps we Mormons can learn something about what our actions towards others should be from our polygamous past.

Al Case  
San Jose, California

### *Obedience versus Integrity*

I just finished reading Dr. DiPardova's article about Lowell Bennion in the fall 1997 issue. Like most of us in the church, I, too, have been involved in discussions of obedience versus integrity. Would I obey an order from a church authority that I felt was morally wrong? Up until a few months ago that discussion was purely academic.

I am shy, socially awkward, and not particularly attractive. As a result, I have never been very lucky in love. At the age of forty-six, I found myself never married and living in an area where the church had only a handful of members, and no active single adults other than me. My prospects for marriage had gone from nearly nil to totally nil. So I joined an international pen pal club. Through this club I met several interesting young women. One woman, a twenty-eight-year-old girl I shall call Kathy, from Asia, wrote that she was unhappy with her life, her church, and her country that gave her few opportunities as an "older" single woman. Through the mail, I introduced her to the church and invited her to look up and attend the local unit in her city. She did so, and ended up investigating the church and eventually being

baptized. The missionary couple who taught and baptized her appeared to adore her. She became like a daughter to them. She was invited over to their home every night, and often slept at the mission home where they resided. One night they called me from Asia and thanked me for bringing her to them and into the church. According to Kathy, they invited her to come to their home in Salt Lake City after their mission and stay with them there, offering her a "home sweet home" in America and all the opportunities for a life and marriage in the church that she did not have in her Asian/Muslim culture. She was enticed by their offer, and, after their mission was completed, she left Asia and came to Salt Lake to their place. Within just a few days she discovered that things were different from what they were in Asia. This missionary couple had either changed their mind about her or else there was a bad miscommunication between them about her being welcome in their home. She had thought she might attend school while in the U.S., but they told her that she was too old to get a student visa. They asked her to leave. With no home, and no other place to go, she came to my place. I later talked to this missionary couple on the telephone, and they told me, "Brother, you are in a difficult situation, and we are sorry. But we do not want her here." That ended any discussion about her being able to return to them. So, together, she and I investigated her options. We went to an immigration lawyer for help, and he told us her only hope to get a permanent visa would be to marry a U.S. citizen or else become a nurse or an electrical engineer. She decided to try for nursing. We went to the local college, and they told us that

there was no age limit for student visas and that she could get a student visa if she became a full-time student. We went to the bishop of my ward and told him of her situation and asked for his counsel and help. He told us he wanted to think about it and talk to the stake president, and that he would get back to us. So we waited, and waited, and waited. When it seemed apparent that he had forgotten her, Kathy decided that her only option was to get married, and so she began to make plans to marry one of her friends that she had met through the pen pal club. She had several pen pals, nonmembers of the church, who wanted to marry her. She decided on one particular man from Minnesota. She was not really interested in him, but she felt that he was the best option. I went back to the bishop and told him of Kathy's plans. The bishop then talked to us both and told Kathy she did not have to marry this man. He urged her not to marry a nonmember or someone she did not want to marry, and to stay in the church and that someday someone for her would come along. If she just prayed and read the scriptures daily, everything would work out fine, he said. He told us that she should go ahead and go to school and stay with me and asked me to help and provide a home for her with me. This surprised me very much, since this meant that a single man and a single woman would be living together without a chaperon. It also bothered Kathy since this not only violated her new church standards, but also her Asian culture as well. (Members of her family today do not know she is living with a man). The bishop never did tell us if he had talked to the stake president or not. I agreed to take Kathy in, and she en-

rolled in school and got a student visa to stay in the U.S.

A few months later I was transferred by my employer to another city. Having nowhere else to go, Kathy came with me and transferred to a nursing school near my home. She found a young single adult ward in a nearby stake and decided to have her membership transferred there. She met with her new bishop and explained her situation to him. He said that under the circumstances, he saw no problem with her living with me and encouraged her to go ahead and stay with me and continue her schooling. I also explained our situation to my bishop, but his reaction was entirely different from Kathy's bishop's reaction. He immediately revoked my temple recommend. He told me he would allow me to have a temple recommend as soon as Kathy was out of my home. He went even further and told me to tell Kathy that she had to be out of my place by the end of the month (which would give her about three weeks). I was stunned. I explained to him that Kathy was in the middle of the school semester, that she had no place to go, and no means of support, and that her visa was totally dependent on her staying in school and getting a nursing degree. He said that did not matter, and he reminded me of the story in the Bible of Abraham and Hagar, and how Abraham had sent Hagar away without worrying about what would happen to her or to his son when the Lord commanded it. (I have thought since, with some amusement, of the question in the temple recommend interview that asks divorced men if they are prompt and current with their child support payments. I think Abraham would have a hard time getting a

temple recommend today.) I reminded him I had been asked by my previous bishop to provide a home for Kathy, and that Kathy's present bishop had authorized her to stay with me and had given her a temple recommend. He said he could not understand why a bishop would ever do that, and that he could not be responsible for what another bishop said. I told him that Kathy's only other option would then be to get married, and that we would be forcing her into a marriage with a nonmember that she did not desire. He again said that was not our responsibility or concern. He said that Kathy was an adult, and, as such, she had the responsibility to make her own decisions. If she chose to marry, that was her problem and her choice to make, not ours.

Deciding that there was no way I could ever turn my back on Kathy, I went without a temple recommend. Kathy took the words from my bishop even harder than I did. Being new in the church, and not aware of church procedure and protocol, she wrote a letter to President Hinckley explaining everything that had happened, and asking him for help. He never answered, but she got a letter from his secretary explaining that President Hinckley preferred to leave a matter such as this to the local leaders of the church and urged her to stay close to her bishop.

A couple of months later I found a single adult ward for older single adults in yet another stake. I talked to the bishop of this ward and told him my situation. He was very sympathetic and invited me to join his ward, which I did. He gave me a temple recommend and made me the ward clerk. I also talked to Kathy's bishop, and he was very happy that I had

found a way to be back in full status in the church, and encouraged me be active in this older single adult ward. Finally, I talked to the bishop of the home ward I was in and told him I wanted to move my membership to this older single adult ward. He said that was fine with him, and that he would take care of the membership transfer. He said he had no problem if another bishop was willing to give me a temple recommend. But as long as I was in his ward, he would not allow it.

In the April 1997 general conference, both President Faust and Elder Oaks talked about how you will always be on the right path if you follow the direction of your bishop. Forgetting about the instruction we have not to write to general authorities, I wrote a letter to both of these brethren and asked if they had any counsel for me in my particular situation. Neither one of them answered, but several weeks later I was called in by my stake president (of the older single adult ward's stake) and told that he had been instructed by the area authority to tell me that the brethren had received my letters. He reprimanded me for writing the letters and also said that he had been instructed to interview me and verify my worthiness to keep my temple recommend. He reviewed with me thoroughly my relationship with Kathy, and, after he was satisfied that we were not violating the law of chastity or doing anything inappropriate, he told me that I should, in the spirit of meekness and humility, go back to my bishop in my home ward and apologize to him for what I had done and clear up any bad feelings that there might be between us. He said it was not appropriate in the church to

switch wards to escape from the decision of one's bishop. To insure that I would do this, he took my temple recommend, and told me he would return it after my home ward bishop called him and verified that I had indeed met with him. So I went back to my home ward bishop and talked to him. As best as I could tell, there were no hard feelings between us, and my stake president returned my temple recommend to me.

Two weeks ago it was announced in sacrament meeting that the older single adult ward would be discontinued at the end of next month. By default, my membership will go back to my home ward. I intend to go to the temple as much as possible in the next few weeks, as I have no reason to believe that my temple recommend will not be revoked again at the end of next month.

Anonymous  
Pasadena, California

### *Pity the Prejudice*

I found instructive Thomas Alexander's review of Leslie Reynolds's *Mormons in Transition* in the fall 1997 issue of *Dialogue* especially as contrasted with Jessie Embry's review in the same issue of Altman and Ginat's *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society*. One of the deficiencies in Reynolds's book, according to Alexander, is Reynolds's tendency to exclude Mormons from Christianity. Alexander notes: "Latter-day Saints will also find extremely offensive her tendency to reserve the term 'Christian' for those believers in Christ whom she calls 'traditional historical, or evangelical Christians.' Though she acknowl-

edges that ‘Mormons may be, in fact, Mormon Christians,’ she seems uncomfortable considering them as such, since she frequently distinguishes between ‘Christians’ and ‘Mormons.’” And, in conclusion, Alexander notes that: “... perceptive Latter-day Saint and other Christian readers will find themselves disappointed because the author’s understanding of Mormonism is deficient and her characterization of the church reveals her prejudice.”

I have no desire to enter the evangelical/Mormon debate regarding the Christianity of the Mormon tradition. My limited understanding of that debate has evangelicals declining to include Mormons as Christians because they simply are not “technically” Christians with, of course, “Christian” being “technically” defined by all true “Christians,” especially evangelicals. I do agree with Alexander that, if he has accurately relayed Reynolds’s meaning, she has revealed her own intolerance and prejudice. However, as we LDS point *that* finger at evangelicals, it seems to me only appropriate that we carefully examine *ourselves* for the same prejudice and intolerance.

Consider, as a prime example, Embry’s review. At one point Embry criticizes Altman and Ginat’s study of polygamous families because they use the term “Mormons” to refer, not only to the LDS tradition, but also to the fundamentalist polygamists who are the primary subject of their study: “Occasionally, the authors even slip and call their study group ‘Mormon plural families.’ I am offended because, although the fundamentalists believe that they are following Mormon traditions, technically they are not Mormons. I would prefer to see the Mormons included in the back-

ground information rather than mixed into the discussion on the contemporary families, almost implying that the current polygamous groups are Mormons.”

I would hope that I don’t need to point out the ironic hypocrisy for those of us who are, technically, “Mormons” inherent in these two reviews. We “Mormons” are both offended when we are not included, by non-Mormons, into Christianity in general *and* offended when others include people who think of themselves as Mormons into that tradition. I find amazing the similarity of the argument used by both evangelicals and Sister Embry. “Mormons” are, technically, not “Christians,” while fundamentalist polygamists are, technically, not “Mormons.” Does that mean, one wonders, that fundamentalist polygamists are “Christians,” though not “Mormons,” while those of us adhering to the LDS tradition are “Mormons” but not “Christians”?

Humans, I have learned to my sorrow, have almost an infinite capacity to absolutely *demand* tolerance for their *own* religious differences while, at the same time, refusing to tolerate religious differences in others. Our collective human history is replete with examples of this phenomenon. Consider the Puritans, who on leaving England to find religious freedom, savagely repressed their own dissidents, to *exactly* the same history replayed, in microcosm though no less morally reprehensible for that, by the LDS church. Though sadly unsurprising, to find such intolerance and prejudice in the pages of *Dialogue* remains disheartening nonetheless.

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Springfield, Missouri