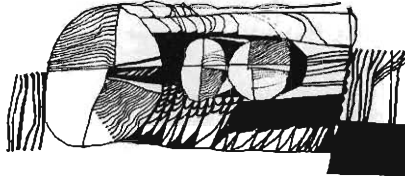


*intervention aroused the wrath of local gentiles and eventually of the federal government. At the very least, history tells us to tread lightly along the boundary between religious faith and political action.*



## MORMONISM AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

*Hyrum Andrus*

*The Constitution by a Thread.* By Richard Vetterli, Salt Lake City: Paramount Publishers, 1967, 311 pp. \$4.75. Hyrum Andrus, Professor of Religion at Brigham Young University, is preparing a four-volume study of the thought of Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith prophesied that the time would come when the United States Constitution would hang by a thread; and he indicated that if it were preserved it would be by the Latter-day Saints. The Mormon Prophet was not merely a spiritual figure concerned with religious thought only. Mormonism has much to say about history, philosophy, and the dynamic trends within the modern world. The Book of Mormon, for example, which relates the history of two major cultures upon the Western hemisphere covering a total period of more than 2500 years, implies much about the rise and fall of civilizations. Many divine pronouncements in modern revelations define correct social, economic, and political principles, and Joseph Smith often prophesied about the Church, America, and the world. There is, therefore, much in Mormon literature to guide the intelligent student toward solid conclusions concerning contemporary trends and problems in America.

Richard Vetterli's *The Constitution by a Thread* is an analysis in light of Mormon thought of current trends that threaten individual freedom and dignity in America and that are undermining the form and philosophy of constitutional government established by the Founding Fathers of the United States. In his analysis, the author also attempts to show that Mormon leaders have taken a positive stand against these baneful tendencies and that the Latter-day Saints have a distinct obligation to preserve the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution.

Vetterli has written this volume in light of the concept of the kingdom of God, which Latter-day Saints believe is to be built up as a religious, socio-economic, and political system. Vetterli does not discuss the program of the kingdom in detail, but he does present his arguments and discussions with its objectives and designs in mind. The kingdom of God will perfect and mature that philosophy of government espoused by the Founding Fathers of the United States Constitution, and it will extend the guarantee of freedom and justice to all men throughout the world. The divine program is two-fold in nature. It requires, first, that the society of Zion be built up among spiritually regenerated men until, as a religious, socio-economic system sufficient within itself to care

for every human need without sacrificing freedom, it stands as an ensign and a standard to the world. In this way, the true liberals among the Latter-day Saints, who are founded in the spiritual heritage that gave birth to American freedom and who have accepted the additional spiritual powers that the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ brings into the lives of conscientious men, can achieve social justice in a free and open society.

The society of Zion is not collectivistic, though at times some Latter-day Saint writers erroneously assert that it is. It is a system of free and mature individuals united by the Holy Spirit while retaining their individualism. Individualism, not collectivism, is the dominant principle upon which the society of Zion, with its socio-economic program, is to be established. But to develop the individual as an individual and promote uncoerced union among mature individuals requires the influence of the Holy Spirit. This divine power makes possible the achievement of goals in social organization that are otherwise unattainable.

By building the society of Zion, the Saints are to be able to "stand independent above all other creatures beneath the celestial world" (Doctrine and Covenants 78:13-14). This includes being independent above the state and state sponsored welfare measures. Thereby the society of Zion is to become an ensign to the world, showing others how to achieve social and economic justice without sacrificing individual freedom and without socializing the state.

The second phase of the divine program concerns the eventual establishment of the government of God—a theocratic political system separate from the Church or society of Zion, but directed by the Lord's Prophet. The Constitution of the United States is the basic organ of the government of God and guarantees freedom and justice to all men under a pluralistic, federal system. Non-members of the Church, as well as members, will be citizens within this political order, and eventually it will embrace all nations and tribes of the earth.

Vetterli expresses the Mormon view that America has been chosen as the land in which the kingdom of God is to be developed in the last days. If that divine system were established in its true form, there would be no need to socialize its governmental branch. The society of Zion would provide the means of establishing social justice among the Latter-day Saints, upon the basis of mature individualism. The influence of the society of Zion would also promote economic strength and stability among those who were not Saints but were identified with the government of God. Non-Mormons would be shown the way to solve their social and economic problems without resorting to state-sponsored welfare programs, and would be challenged to use the methods of freedom in doing so.

It goes without saying that the kingdom of God has not been established. Meanwhile, modern man faces the problem of achieving both freedom and social justice. In the United States, the *laissez faire* economy of the nineteenth century has given way, because of its deficiencies and the disruptions that occurred due to its weaknesses, to a system of economics based upon state intervention and control. This system is increasingly collectivistic; it seeks to bring about social union by coercive measures; and it stifles individual freedom and initiative.

It may be said in truth that modern man is caught upon the horns of a

dilemma, and many thoughtful people are seeking to find a solution to the perplexing issues that now confront mankind. Richard Vetterli is one of these thoughtful and dedicated individuals. While secular conservatives seek only a return to the free enterprise economy of the nineteenth century, he sees that the true goal should be the kingdom of God. But America is fast departing from the inspired philosophy of government based upon human freedom that the Founding Fathers of the United States Constitution expressed in that great document. Under the pressure of the times, modern liberals are justifying and fostering the socialization of the state.

Vetterli believes that Latter-day Saint liberals in particular should take another look at the world in light of the principles and goals set forth in the kingdom of God. While modern secular conservatism is deficient, he contends that modern liberalism is perverse. It is actually leading to a loss of freedom and constitutional government. Mormonism has a plan of its own, and one that will realize God's purposes to bring both freedom and social justice to all men; and Latter-day Saints should assume a posture in the present dilemma that is consistent with that divine plan. To foster collectivism is not the way to build up the kingdom of God. We must have a rebirth of freedom, not that we might return to the past, but that we might get more solidly on the path that leads to the kingdom of God. The departures that have been made, and are yet being made, are serious; we must treat them so. Vetterli's forceful and hard-hitting volume is a call to arms. "There is a battle to be fought," he declares, "and it must be won" (p. 20).

Anyone who has deeply studied Mormon political philosophy knows that it conforms to the philosophy of government expressed by the Founding Fathers and that Mormonism enlarges that philosophy into a concept of a world government based upon the freedom and dignity of man. Vetterli understands this point. By contrast, the "One World Liberalism" of modern times, if permitted to succeed in its plan of world socialism, "would mean the end of the American dream" (p. 274).

While the statesmen of the world search in vain for answers to complex problems of war and peace and international brotherhood—sending many of them chasing the illusion of world government—Mormonism offers a reiteration of America's mission. It is a far cry from liberal prophets of doomsday who predict that the United States will be swallowed up in some world-wide socialist state. . . .

In Mormon philosophy, a philosophy that ought to be the guiding principle of all true Americans, America must be strengthened, not weakened; its freedoms must be extended, not diminished; its Constitution must be preserved, not destroyed or corrupted; its moral and cultural example must be ennobled, not degenerated. The future of mankind depends upon this. (pp. 283, 284)

Here Vetterli specifies that the philosophy of the Founding Fathers and the ideals of the kingdom of God are the foundation on which the Saints are to build universal peace and justice in the world.

By contrast, most modern Mormon liberals (the same is true of secular con-

servatives) are deficient in their understanding of the full program of the kingdom of God and the place it has in the over-all plan of God for America and the world. Religiously, they espouse the view that man, if taught proper ethical and moral principles, will by his own intellect and effort attain the Christian standard of life. Man's dependence upon Christ and his need to be renewed, regenerated, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit that he might receive the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit and the love of God which brings true social union are quietly passed over or de-emphasized in modern liberalism's secular, humanistic theology. In the liberal way of thinking, the powers and revelations of the Holy Spirit should be made secondary and subordinate to human intellect. Furthermore, except where moral issues are directly concerned, current Mormon liberals maintain that God's prophet should say nothing about the secular or political affairs of society. Church members should be left to think and do what they will about social, economic, and political matters; and the program of the restored Gospel should impose no other requirements upon an individual than those moral and ethical principles that directly pertain to the "good life."

To illustrate, Martin Hickman, a newly appointed faculty member at Brigham Young University, reviewed my book *Liberalism, Conservatism and Mormonism* in the Summer, 1967, issue of *Dialogue*. He voiced the modern liberal position in one of his criticisms of my work, in which I set forth the social, economic, and political concepts of the kingdom of God and suggest that Latter-day Saints are committed by the love of truth and the program of this dispensation to measure man-made theories and systems in the social, economic, and political spheres of society by the concept of that kingdom. Hickman characterizes it as a "mischievous book." "If the arguments of this book ever become widely accepted in the Church," he laments, "criteria other than devotion to the gospel will be used to measure acceptable Church behavior, Church members will become confused about the nature and mission of the Church, division and bitterness arising from political differences will be infused into Church relationships, and members will be distracted from the principle task of giving effect to the teachings of Christ in their lives."

This tendency to accept only a part of Mormon thought—this lessening of man's responsibility to accept and uphold intelligently that which God has revealed—is characteristic of modern Mormon liberalism. And it opens the way for liberals to accept a secular solution to man's social and economic problems, instead of the soul-regenerating program of the kingdom of God.

Whatever position a member of the L.D.S. Church may take relative to modern liberalism and conservatism, his primary object should be to understand and help build up the kingdom of God in the earth. Here Latter-day Saints should be united. Union on this objective would lessen the tensions on secondary issues. Everyone may not agree with Vetterli and the approach he takes. He has presented a forceful discussion in which no punches are pulled, and a spade is called a spade. His primary argument is that the American dream needs to be re-analyzed; and this re-analysis should be made in light of the kingdom of God and that which it has to offer to a confused and perplexed world. Mormon liberals, as well as secular conservatives, should take a calm and clear look at the basic propositions and arguments set forth in this book. Before they criticize