children remember with nostalgia? A day in Amish country where bearded gentlemen ride by in closed carriages, laughing, always laughing, while buses and cars snort behind them, unable to pass. A weekend in New York City where a man rushes two blocks through the Christmas rush to catch a bus because an elderly black lady left her purse. Perhaps they will remember the courage of New Yorkers, the old, the lame, the cab drivers who face those streets.

They may remember waking up in Williamsburg to find a light snow all over the Yule log and fresh greens in all the windows. A boat ride to Nantucket where seagulls greeted us from another time. And a day in Nauvoo where the children were less impressed with Joseph Smith's house than with the noble expanse of river and the real wheat growing in the fields.

A few Sundays ago our Sacrament Meeting program was presented by the Youth: youth bishopric, youth speakers, youth musicians. One of the speakers, a fluent, golden-haired lad of seventeen, described the world as, he said, Satan would have it: a world in which white and black hate each other, a world which fights senseless wars for obscure reasons, and a world which persecutes people for the length of their hair. I was struck by this thought: Those of us who grew up in my Wardhouse seldom concerned themselves with such matters. Ours was an enclosure, perhaps an incestuous one. We were part of the Silent Generation. And then another thought: Though we were quite provincial, we had not been crippled by the World War nor by the Depression. We were allowed to grow in peace. Because our parents had been leveled by the Depression, we were also equally affluent. Perhaps that soil can make a bridge between the old and the new. Perhaps the lessons of the old Wardhouse may yet strengthen the young of today's church.

Meanwhile, I should like to design a building to house us all. It will be round and surrounded by trees or mountains, prairie or desert. It will be made of glass and of materials which show our love of this earth. Its doors will stand open to strangers, its windows open to light. It will begin with a round, soundproof foyer, large enough that Mormons may greet each other — as they must — but without chairs, lest they linger too long. The Recreation Hall will be suitably separate from the Chapel, and the Chapel will be semi-circular because I love to look into the faces of my brothers and sisters. Because our leaders are lay leaders and unpaid, they will not sit over us, but with us. The classrooms will be semi-circular too, and warmly painted and carpeted for comfort and communication.

Yes, joy and laughter, worship and reverence will be in the building, and in us.

A HANDFUL WITH QUIETNESS

Far Beyond the Half-Way Covenant

Karl Keller

Karl Keller teaches polymorphous perversity at San Diego State College, is uncommitted, and loves little children.

Puritanism began as a covenant theology. Those who held to its fundamental principles up into the seventeenth century, when it dominated men's lives in Europe and especially in New England, believed that the foremost of their religious duties was to make their invisible and spiritual covenants with God visible; that is, to demonstrate their sure conviction of the truth with holy living and convincing testimony *before* being admitted to membership in the church. This was accomplished through means regulated by the authority of the original covenanters, who became the guardians of the church and of society, judging what persons were fit to be admitted and rejecting the spiritually unfit. To be admitted, a person had to make a confession of faith, showing that he was conscious of God's special grace in his religious experience. The church was therefore made up exclusively of well-informed, exceedingly

self-conscious, and fully convinced believers. They called themselves the elect of God.

By 1662, however, Puritan ministers decided on a change in this practice. This change, called The Half-Way Covenant, made it possible for children and grandchildren of covenant members to be admitted to membership until they came to their own full conviction of the truth. There were to be among the visible saints no uncertain members of the church. The sacraments of the church were not converting ordinances but were the exclusive right of the elect.

By the end of the seventeenth century, a further compromise was made which forever changed the character of American Protestanism. Initiated by Solomon Stoddard, Congregational minister at Northampton, Mass., and gradually adopted by all New England congregations, the change meant that admission to the church might *precede* a full testimony of the truth and and that the sacraments of the church were not the exclusive right of the elect but were means of converting the weak of faith to full conviction of truth. Membership in the church was seen as a *means* to a holy life, not the reward of believing, as it had been earlier.

There were both advantages and disadvantages in the new practice. Far more people included themselves in the religious activities of the community churches; far more felt religion was made to move the common man toward a better religious life; far more saw religion as a program of self-improvement. But at the same time, the intellectual impulse and introspective fervor of early Puritanism were lost. It was no longer necessary to use the mind to work to discover one's spiritual worth. Religion was no longer a matter of God's determinations (and man's intellectual effort to discover those determinations) but instead a matter of man's religious motives and moral actions (he could save *himself* if he tried). There was gradually much less of an interest in God's role in a man's life and much more interest in religion as a self-improvement program. Piety (the pursuit of knowledge of the power of God in one's life) gradually degenerated into moralism (the pursuit of ways of living comfortably with one's conscience). Intellectualism in American religion rose and fell with the rise and fall of covenant theology. With its demise, anti-intellectuality came to dominate American religious thinking.

I have mentioned all of this because I sense that Mormonism has been undergoing a similar change. It is valuable to be aware of the consequences. Mormonism, too, is a covenant theology in its basic teachings. From the outset of the Church, conviction was exacted *before* baptism was granted. Mormonism has also had its Half-Way Covenant in allowing half-way membership to children until they can believe for themselves. But as with the congregational churches in early America, the Church has, since the late 1950s and early

1960s, encouraged baptism and membership as a *means* of conversion and testimony. Someone interested in the Church is now encouraged by our leaders and missionaries to be baptized *before* he is completely knowledgeable and possessed of absolute conviction. One's *desire* to believe and a mere taste of the spirit now makes him eligible to become a part of the body of believers.

The result has been of great advantage to the Church: the membership has swelled by several million and millions of others are influenced by its programs and power. But at the same time there have been some unfortunate consequences, and these appear to have been overlooked even though they have seriously affected the quality of religious life in the Church.

With the influx of members who need years of instruction while learning the elementary principles of the Church, the teaching and preaching in the Church has had to adapt itself to the lower level of the convert, much more in recent years than

ever before. To be helpful, meetings and activities have had to be geared to his level. Publications and programs have had to be designed for his elementary reading and listening. Lessons, discussions, sermons, entertainments, and cultural events, even General Conference addresses, have had to become more and more elementary, rather than increasing in sophistication or refinement of ideas. ("Elementary" should not be confused here with "simple and direct" or with "fundamental.")

Moreover, year in and year out, the influx of "unconverted" but committed converts continues, and so the meetings and activities, the publications and programs seldom rise above the level of the initiate. No relief appears in sight. *The Reader's Digest* becomes our scriptures. We hear Albert Hay Malotte instead of Bach, Edgar A. Guest instead of John Milton. We quote J. Edgar Hoover instead of Joseph Smith, Jacob Hamblin instead of B. H. Roberts, Cleon Skousen instead of J. Reuben Clark. The discussions and reading material have breadth without much depth. The interpretations of world problems tends toward gross oversimplification and misunderstanding, with simple nationalism as a ready solution. Our theology becomes a handful of maxims. Our language becomes clichés. Our very personalities in the Church become a stereotype.

Thus, the needs of the seasoned, knowledgeable members become ignored. Opportunities for sophistication in the gospel for life-long, thinking members diminish. A place for the intellectual in the Church disappears.

Of course, one would not want to exclude one soul from among the converts. The problem is not at all the fault of the converts. One only wishes that church-wide and local leaders could recognize (and especially the teachers in the Church) that as soon as the program of the Church is designed primarily for the new members or for the unlettered in the Church (much of the time, it seems, *solely* for them), those who hunger and thirst for further enlightenment are bound to experience alienation, and perhaps exclusion. Their activity in the Church must then become something outside and beyond *the* activity of the Church. Exclude the intellectual and a valuable source of ideas and energy is lost; yet when the Church goes as far beyond its own half-way covenant as it seems now to have gone, the intellectual may find in the activities or business of the Church little that can be of interest to him. He has been there before and is eager for new territory.

In all of this, there are implications for the converts as well. It is axiomatic that the lower the level of awareness and experience of new members, the more control there must be from the leaders of the Church. This is always one of the problems with rapid-growing populations; the uneducated masses must be brought effectively under control. The result for both the advanced member of the Church and the new member, however, is decreased opportunity of expression and severely reduced individuality. All are expected to conform to a norm that is often mediocre, simplistic, and spiritually unstimulating.

No doubt my complaint oversimplifies the problem, and may in fact seem mere snobbishness. There are complex matters involved. But one wonders if leaders and teachers in the Church are always aware that a religion which addresses itself primarily to the outsider, the initiate, and the apprentice to the faith may in reality be in danger of losing the seasoned insider, the spiritually experienced, and the intellectually advanced. A program designed only for the intellect and experience of twelve-year-olds cannot expect to hold its twenty- or thirty-year-olds very long.

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