

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The following letters relate to Victor Cline's column in Personal Voices, "Sounding Brass and Tinkling Symbols." In the First, Karen Smith challenges Dr. Cline's views on women, a challenge which he tries to meet in his response. The Third Letter, from Marvin Rytting, raises some interesting questions about theories of sexuality expressed by Dr. Cline (Spring 1971) and by Owen Clark ("Letters to the Editor," Spring 1972).

On Women

Dear Dr. Cline:

Your reply to Ms. D. of Washington D.C. left me feeling less than comfortable. While agreeing that women should be freed from those things promoting loss of self esteem, doubt, fear, etc., there are a few points I would like to discuss.

Your statement that leading "liberationists" (you have known) are disturbed and merit sympathy could be construed by some as a justification for convenient labeling. I always wonder about the chicken and the egg question when encountering this type of situation. Can you not also verify the possibility that for every disturbed militant liberationist, there must be at least two suppressed, neurotic housewives somewhere? Again, the egg or the chicken? As I understand it, one aspect of the women's movement is to encourage men to once again assume more responsibility for child rearing (a primary Gospel objective) and less time pursuing the almighty dollar. How many hours a week does the average father spend with each young child? Certainly not enough. Perhaps, for women who would like to work outside the home, an arrangement of sharing an occupation — like two physical therapists operating a practice on alternate days — or maybe even each person having a separate part-time job, would work out satisfactorily for parents and children. This would certainly be easily achievable after children are all in school. It seems to me that what the Church is saying is that a child needs love and special attention — parental attention — in those early formative years. Perhaps the only time a child needs exclusive *female* attention is during the nursing period. To me, it is certainly frightening to see a crying child become hysterical when he is handed to the father/stranger, instead of the mother/parent(?) for consolation. I am sure that this arrangement I am proposing was found more often in pioneer homesteads where occupations were located on the homefront (like farming, etc.) and the whole family was involved out of necessity.

Consequently, taking these types of positive points of the Women's Movement, I can see it being potentially *constructive* to the family structure, rather than destructive. Which way this comes about depends on the women *and* men involved.

As far as the Patriarchal family, you did explain why it was a good idea to have *someone* as "boss," "leader," "president," etc. but you never mentioned why *someone* is always a man. To say "he is the Priesthood holder" to me appears circular. I am not interested in dominating my husband (or him-me) but am, in truth, raising a sincere theological question as to why women are always, even in a women's organization like the Relief Society, ultimately controlled by men? In searching the scriptures for light on this, the only thing I have found is in Moses 4:20-25. Here the Lord explains to the Snake, to Eve, and then to Adam, what their respective punishments are for taking part in the Fall. To Eve he says, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception. In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and *thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee.*"

Knowing the relationship of pre-existence to present earthly position/situation leads me to believe that perhaps there lies the missing link. Could it be after all that women are some type of second-class citizens that *need* to be controlled? And would not this contention fill us with true empathetic understanding of our Negro brothers and sisters who also await revelation on their supposed pre-earth deficiency?

Believe me, Brother Cline, the implications of these thoughts devastate me. The thought of giving moral credence to world-wide chauvinism is awesome.

The interesting thing is, I have had these thoughts for some time and have presented them to various members of the priesthood, including elders and Bishops, none of whom has been able to disagree with my final analyses. In fact, some have pointed out, with interest, other areas of the Church in which women are not recognized equally with men. Notice that authors of significant books for the membership as a whole (*Jesus the Christ* variety, not Relief Society texts or the How-to-Be-A-Woman numbers) are never women. How is it, if women are equal in the Church and in the eyes of the Lord, that they have not demonstrated equal spiritual leadership? And then there are the little subtleties like the frequency which opening-closing prayers are given by women. In our college branch it's about nine males to every female. Note how many more are (capable of?) offering sacrament gems. What percentage of the seminary and especially institute teachers are women? How and why did all these unwritten traditions get established? And, again most importantly, what does all this mean about the inherent "nature" of women?

I cannot help but think that these questions I pose so audaciously today, will be common concerns of my daughters tomorrow. I would very much appreciate your comments.

Sincerely,

Karen Smith
San Diego, California

Victor Cline Responds:

Dear Karen:

I'm afraid I am in that same line you are in when it comes to asking tough questions for which there don't seem to be many answers. I've got my own special list. And I'm sure even President Lee has some he'd like to get answered. I understand that every Monday afternoon he meets with the current week's new crop of missionaries preparing to leave for all parts of the world for their two years in the field. At that time they have the opportunity to ask the Prophet questions about L.D.S. theology, doctrines, etc. And on a number of occasions he candidly acknowledges that there are many things we just don't know, or do not have answers to.

But several things do seem quite clear and apparent to me. The Deity and his Son are of male gender, not "it" or female. The Church is administered primarily by males (as was the early Christian church) whether we are talking about the First Presidency, Council of the Twelve, Regional Representatives, Stake Presidencies, Bishoprics, etc. The Priesthood organization is all male, though its blessings are shared in by wives. But unmarried women, of course, don't directly "share." The father is Patriarch in the home. And, as you knowingly point out, in Moses 4:20-25 it suggests that Eve's desire should be to her husband who should rule over her. This is the "order of the Church." And while the Church could comfortably accommodate by allowing more women to give talks, prayers, etc. that wouldn't change by one iota the male domination of the Church or its government.

If the true leader of the Church is Jesus Christ and revelation and inspiration are important communication channels, then I think the issue of the strong position of the male gender in the Church has to be referred to Him. If, however the Church is of men, even good men, then they and their present and former leadership, tradition and 19th century mores will have to be held accountable for women's secondary position or role in the Church.

However as a practical matter in working with L.D.S. women in a great variety of situations and circumstances I've heard extremely little in the way of discontent about women's role in the Church. However I hear a great deal from many L.D.S. women who wish their husbands would "honor their priesthood," be patriarchs in their family, say family prayers, hold family home evening, etc. In fact, the major issues of concern to most L.D.S. women I know focus on breakdown in communications and love relations with their husbands, concerns about their children's development or behavior, and dealing with difficult people in their life or job situation. I've never seen a woman, or for that matter even a man, who wanted the job of being Bishop. Assuming a position of responsibility in our Church, at least, always requires considerable sacrifice, even though there are some compensations.

Your notion that fathers should be more involved in rearing their children is an excellent one. And I see nothing wrong with women being fulfilled vocationally, as long as the children receive proper parenting. With regards to women not writing more significant books for Church membership, I see no reason why they can't. But they have to compete on the open market with suitable manuscripts just like everyone else.

With regards to having some women teach seminary, this is certainly an