

REVIEWS

Cartooning Mormons

Freeway to Perfection. By Calvin Grondahl. Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1978. 95 pp., illus. \$2.95.

Reviewed by GARY L. BUNKER, Professor of Psychology at Brigham Young University.

Caricaturing the Mormon experience is hardly a new venture, but the cultural context of the present differs drastically from the past. For nearly the first century of Mormonism, cartoonists, including such powerful image makers as Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler, maligned the Mormons unmercifully. On the other hand, a few Mormons and even some non-Mormons sympathetic to the plight of Mormonism used the cartoon medium to defend the faith. They likened Orson Pratt to David against Goliath in the Newman-Pratt debate, caricatured Senator Cragin and Congressman Cullom for their anti-polygamy legislation, attacked the Godbeites for their heterodoxy, and chided the national media for the simplistic treatment accorded Reed Smoot. Of course, such humorous counterattacks were no match for the flood of anti-Mormon illustrations in the national press.

With Mormonism now more securely rooted in the modern social setting, the Mormon cartoonist can afford to be more introspective and reflective as opposed to the apologetic stance of his artistic Mormon forebearers. It is in this spirit that Calvin Grondahl has applied the cartoonist's tools of the trade to Mormon themes once again.

Grondahl has already established himself as a cartoonist well beyond the borders of the Wasatch front. Syndicated

nationally by the Newspaper Enterprise Association, his cartoons appear in more than seven hundred newspapers. His artistic commentary on the national scene is often the most profound and persuasive statement on the editorial page where it appears.

By and large Grondahl maintains the high standard of excellence in this collection of Mormon cartoons. According to Allan Nevins and Frank Weitenkampf the cartoonist's creative product can be judged by three criteria: wit, fidelity to reality and moral purpose. Judged against each of these requirements, Grondahl's work fares well.

Religious cartooning presents some special problems for the popular artist. The potential for misunderstanding and offending the sensibilities of the faithful is particularly acute. Despite touching on a wide array of themes encountered in the Mormon experience, including home teaching, courtship, large families, food storage, visual aids from the pulpit, pageants, the lost tribes, Relief Society rehearsals, E.R.A., "religious" fads, etc., with very few exceptions, Grondahl manages to avoid the pitfalls of speaking lightly of the sacred and making fun of others. A cartoon portraying an old maid giving a family home evening lesson to plants exemplifies the exception because it perpetuates an unfortunate stereotype. Such cartoons are neither typical of the volume nor of Grondahl. On the whole, it is not the carnival mirror of distortion that is held up to us, but an insightful and entertaining reflection of the frustrations, moral dilemmas, foibles and challenges faced by Mormons.

Aside from the quality of the humor which readers of Grondahl have come to