

Unprickly View of a Thorny Issue

God and Government, The Separation of Church and State by Ann E. Weiss (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1982), 126 pp., \$8.95.

Reviewed by Jay M. Haymond, Coordinator of Collections and Research, Utah State Historical Society.

THIS SMALL (126 pages) book written for juveniles, is one person's view of a thorny issue in America today. Mormons will be interested to read Ms. Weiss's first three chapters discussing historical events leading up to present problems in six areas regarding separation of church and state: schools, taxes, conflicting rights, special privilege, cults, and the religious Right.

Her balanced approach and treatment are noteworthy and commendable. She tells where she stands but is not overbearing about her point of view, certainly a virtue in authors. She reveals her background in the preface and presents her opinions, usually near the end of each chapter. Most often the author divides the present conflict between separationists and accommodationists. Separationists want a "higher wall" between government and religion, as mentioned by Thomas Jefferson when arguing for amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Accommodationists prefer to "keep" the church close to government for their "mutual benefit." Ms. Weiss makes clear the position of the Constitutional framers: they wanted to insure freedom for all to practice religion as fully as possible. After the Constitution was ratified some state governing bodies wanted more explicit language on "rights," especially including religion in a bill of rights to guarantee freedom from a state church—hence the provision for religion in the first amendment.

Ezra Taft Benson, president of the Quorum of the Twelve, in a speech at BYU in 1980 expressed an accommodationist view in general terms suggesting

that he saw it as the position of the Church.

In conclusion, let us summarize this grand key, these "Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophet," for our salvation hangs on them.

First: The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything.

Second: The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works.

Third: The living prophet is more important to us than a dead prophet.

Fourth: The prophet will never lead the Church astray.

Fifth: The prophet is not required to have any particular earthly training or credentials to speak on any subject or act on any matter at any time.

Sixth: The prophet does not have to say "Thus saith the Lord" to give us scripture.

Seventh: The prophet tells what we need to know, not always what we want to know.

Eighth: The prophet is not limited by men's reasoning.

Ninth: The prophet can receive revelation on any matter temporal or spiritual.

Tenth: The prophet may be involved in civic matters.

Eleventh: The two groups who have the greatest difficulty in following the prophet are the proud who are learned and the proud who are rich.

Twelfth: The prophet will not necessarily be popular with the world or the worldly.

Thirteenth: The prophet and his counselors make up the First Presidency—the highest quorum in the Church.

Fourteenth: The prophet and the presidency—the living prophet and the First Presidency—follow them and be blessed, reject them and suffer.

(*BYU Devotional Speeches*
Feb., 1980), pp. 26–27

One of the most interesting chapters for me is on "cults." Weiss does not provide a satisfactory definition of a cult nor does she criticize cults as such. She points to the Reverend Jim Jones People's Temple as the dark side and warns against re-

peating that kind of demagoguery. She goes on to suggest except for the passage of time, other "established" religions would be classed as cults, Mormonism among them. Her second mention of Mormonism is in her chapter on taxes. She further observes on taxes that churches have the most favored tax advantage of any other type of group in America. Which takes us to the success of contemporary fundamentalist groups.

Weiss discusses our contemporary world as possibly being in a time of religious revival similar to the Great Awakening led by Jonathan Edwards or the Second Awakening led by Charles G. Finney in midnineteenth-century America. Her description of modern fundamentalist groups includes their Old Testament—oriented intolerance, anti-communist paranoia, and dogmatic support for military solutions to world problems. In fairness, Mormonism is saved in part from this category by the LDS First Presidency's MX statement which warns . . .

against the terrifying arms race in which the nations of the earth are presently engaged. We deplore in particular the building of vast arsenals of nuclear weaponry. We are advised that there is already enough such weaponry to destroy in large measure our civilization, with consequent suffering and misery of incalculable extent.

(*Ensign*, June 1981), p. 76

The Moral Majority, Christian Voice, Oral Roberts, and Billy Graham are all

mentioned in Weiss's spectrum of fundamentalist evangelical groups and preachers competing for minds and money in our midst. Political action is the most frightening aspect of these groups' work because the money generated by their Madison-Avenue approach to proselyting gives them leverage to multiply income and power beyond the scope their numbers deserve. Their political influence was demonstrated in 1980 when targeted "liberals" were turned out of office to be replaced by followers of one fundamentalist group or another. Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell converted his church meetings into political action committees where people in attendance received instructions on how to vote and influence congressional representatives. Critics advocate thinking of this family of advocates, not as religions but as interest groups like the National Association of Manufacturers, American Medical Association or American Bar Association who lobby for their own advantage, sometimes without thinking about the general good.

The author's presentation of these facts and positions is an attempt to inform rather than inflame. She is quite aware that regulation of any religion in any way is what the Founding Fathers wanted to avoid and that subsequent events have proven their wisdom. The book is a vindication of the framer's faith in democratic principles to leave the governing of religion to the people rather than their representatives.

The Klan in Utah

Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah by Larry R. Gerlach (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1982), 248 pp., \$17.50.

Reviewed by John R. Sillito, archivist and assistant professor of libraries at Weber State College. He is particularly interested in the history of the left in twentieth-century Utah.

For most of us, mention of the Ku Klux Klan conjures up visions of the Deep South—night riders in white robes, burning crosses, and, as the lyrics of "Strange Fruit," Billie Holiday's jazz classic, state, "Black body swaying in the Southern breeze/Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." In reality, the Klan was a nationwide movement which combined fra-