

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.

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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*
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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-