

where all the discords of life are resolved into the most delicious harmonies, and [one's] whole existence becomes illuminated by a divine intelligence. Sorrow and sin reveal this spot to all men. . . . They reveal what beliefs and dogmas becloud and darken. They produce that intense consciousness without which virtue cannot rise above innocency (in Miller 1950, 479).

As one lovely sister said to me at a retreat last year, "We really do have to grow up and stand on our own feet." Maturing, never an easy process, is even harder in an institution that in many ways tries to keep us as unquestioning, obedient children. It is a paradox inherent in our own belief system. Perhaps dealing with these tensions can bring strength and wisdom, but the process requires honest confrontation and commitment to truth, not relinquishment of responsibility. Developing the kind of courage that such freedom demands may in the end bring us the virtue that can rise above innocence and allow us the greatest gift of all — understanding.

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## Beached on the Wasatch Front: Probing the Us and Them Paradigm

*Karen Marguerite Moloney*

IN A CHAPTER FROM HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *Blackberry Winter*, Margaret Mead describes the rejection she experienced during her freshman year at DePauw, a small midwestern college. Students had come to DePauw, in Mead's words, "for fraternity life, for football games, and for establishing the kind of rapport with other people that would make them good Rotarians in later life and their wives good members of the garden club" (in Comley 1984, 666). Mead didn't fit in. As an Episcopalian who dressed unconventionally, spoke with an eastern accent, didn't chew gum, and openly displayed her poetry books and tea set,

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she did not possess the assets prized by the campus sororities. As a result, she spent a productive year writing pageants, designing floats, getting a friend elected class vice-president by “setting the sororities against one another” (p. 666), and feeling like an exile while she sat in the library reading drama reviews in the *New York Times*. At the end of the year, she transferred to Barnard College, but her fleeting and mild experience of discrimination colored her life, leading her to strong conclusions about how society should not be organized.

My own experience with prejudice as a Mormon convert, like that of Mead’s with the myopia of the Greek system, has been mild. Like Mead, I was born neither self nor slave, nor have I been denied an education due to my sex. I have never been barred entry to a temple on the basis of my race; I have not even been required to use a separate temple entrance, as are today’s black South African Church members. Still, my experience is not without lessons. I may not be male, but I am white, middle-class, physically whole. And if I am to believe the compliment paid some time ago by a friend of vintage Salt Lake descent, then I have also lost the “fanatical edge” that sometimes sets apart a convert to Mormonism. (After discussing with this friend at length the implications of his asking for excommunication, he remarked on my compassion, noting that one could never tell I was a convert.)

But if I have a few horror tales to tell, what about those converts who do not blend in? I contend that, even if they are unaware of any prejudice leveled against them, such bias may still exist. I believe, in fact, that the shortsightedness I have encountered might well remain disguised to a new convert in Bolivia — or Los Angeles. Even so, as long as any Church members cherish the belief that they are inherently superior, then that belief may well result in prejudice toward their newer peers. I also believe that even the mildest form of discrimination is utterly incompatible with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One month after my high school graduation, as a sensitive eighteen-year-old, I was baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After what had been for me a long and stressful investigation of the Church, it was refreshing to receive the warm fellowship of the Latter-day Saints in my Whittier, California stake. They hailed my courage in forsaking the church I had loved all my life, the church of my heritage, the Roman Catholic Church — especially in view of my parents’ opposition and deep, uncomprehending grief. They complimented me on my ability to discern the truth, something they were not sure they themselves could have done had it not been for careful Mormon upbringings. They envied me the strength of my testimony. And they were kind — anxious to pick me up on the way to church or to a dance. The returned missionary I met while he was cleaning the goat cage in the children’s zoo where I worked that summer, and whom I had asked to baptize me, became my private tutor, carefully, enthusiastically explaining Church doctrine after hosing down the picnic tables on his evening shifts. Repeatedly, and prophetically, he warned me to be sure to separate the gospel from the Latter-day Saints. His friendly willingness — and ability — to answer any question I asked him, coupled with my own research prior to baptism, resulted in my understanding within months what might otherwise have taken years.

By the time I transferred six months later from Pomona College to BYU, I looked and acted like a lifelong Mormon. My new classmates, many of whom in my small honors classes were the offspring of prominent Church leaders, invariably figured I was from Salt Lake. I had even dropped my skirt hems a full four inches to just above the knee, a length at the time conspicuously absent from the pages of my much-loved *Seventeen* magazine. I did so, not because I wanted to fit in among my new peers, though unquestionably my longer skirts helped me to do that, but because I was on fire to be righteous, to be the best Latter-day Saint I could be, to live the lifestyle of my new religion as fervently as possible — and a General Authority had denounced short skirts at stake conference. I had been aware while investigating the Church that joining it would be an all-or-nothing proposition. I was now prepared to give it my all.

My hazing began shortly after I arrived in Provo. I wonder now whether my blending in was a key factor in what followed. If I had stood out, for example, would people have trusted me, revealed their thoughts to me? Could I have gotten close enough to learn what they really felt? My sister-in-law, who joined the Church in the East, scorned the lack of vision in lifelong members and resisted assimilating. When she did arrive in Utah a few years later, she brought her confidence with her. As a direct result, I feel, no one said to her the things they said to me. Perhaps my viewpoint is privileged like that of the black who can pass for white in a dominantly white society; and information gleaned by an outsider who passes for an insider can be vital to anyone trying to get the whole picture.

One of my earliest glimpses into my outsider status came from a roommate's father, a convert from the South. He explained to me humbly one day that he knew he had not been valiant enough to have been born under the covenant — but that he didn't mind; he was simply grateful to be a member at all. About the same time, I picked up the idea, from a religion course as I recall, that Abraham 3:19 (“These two facts exist, that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they”) referred to an explicit hierarchy of spiritual talent in pre-mortal life, one which carried over neatly into the mortal sphere. Full recognition and the highest responsibilities fell to those born under the covenant; trailing these elect first families clambered up converts to the Church; in last place straggled the non-Mormon hosts.

Undoubtedly our class discussed the idea of movement among the three categories, but what I remember is the implication that I had gotten into the kingdom on a second chance — maybe even as a favor. The suggestion that I was a mini-spirit set off a crisis of worry for me. Was I endowed with celestial fiber, or would my terrestrial nature win out in the end? Was it worth trying for exaltation? Did I have a bona fide chance of making it? The dilemma strikes me as preposterous now, but I was very young and too willing to take seriously the words of members I felt were in a position to teach me. I even listened to the hiking companion who explained to me one day that, true, Hartman Rector *was* both a convert and a General Authority — but he didn't radiate the wisdom and spiritual depth that the other Brethren did. So what

hope was there for me? If I weren't to give up altogether, and that was not an option for one as committed as I was, then the only available path appeared to be further assimilation.

I have compassion for the young convert that I was during those next years. I recall the religion classes and the sacrament meeting talks, the hymns and the testimonies, in which so much was made of bloodline and/or pioneer heritage. Unfortunately, I was the child of monogamous unions, I came from a small family, and my parents, who could have demonstrated their spiritual mettle by being baptized, refused to cooperate. It was, of course, further occasion to question *my* spiritual mettle. What kind of Latter-day Saint was I if my own parents wouldn't join me in striving for a celestial family? And what kind of mother would I make, weighed down as I undoubtedly was with all the sins of my unenlightened forebears? To make matters worse, I didn't even play the piano very well.

I have admiration, though, for the young convert who learned to use the scriptures in her defense. When one friend — whose Arizona lineage included Smith blood — explained his father's teaching that converts were all right, but they should marry only fellow converts, I referred him to Ezekiel 18, a chapter my high school Bible subtitled "Personal Responsibility." There my friend read a rousing, unambiguous sermon, the theme of which is epitomized in its twentieth verse: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." And, logically extending this idea, neither shall the son bear the virtue of the father. I followed up with Matthew 20, in which the laborers hired at the eleventh hour to work in the Lord's vineyard received the same wages as those hired at the beginning of the day, despite the first group's grumbling. Incredibly, the chapters actually demonstrated to him that his father had been wrong.

But I recoil again when I recall a boyfriend's expression of concern that I did not share with him his deeply rooted gospel, southern Utah background. He was serious about me, but anxious regarding my convert status. He hastened to assure me, however, that he had been making his uneasiness a matter of prayer.

If I had not heard similar stories from other women, perhaps I could dismiss such an incident as an aberration. I'm afraid, though, that isn't the case. The following anecdote is especially revealing. Some years ago when a male friend of mine considered dating a non-Mormon, his roommate, whose particular zeal was missionary work, advised him not to. After all, even if she did later join the Church, she would still always be a convert.

I'd like to think that experiences like these no longer occur, that perhaps they represent the lingering influence, now spent, of pronouncements similar to those contained in a once much-circulated talk by Elder Alvin R. Dyer entitled "For What Purpose?"<sup>1</sup> The 1961 sermon, addressed to missionaries who were instructed not to share its insights with investigators, "connected race, nation, time, and place to premortal valiancy" (Copeland 1988, 91) and

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<sup>1</sup> See Lee Copeland, "From Calcutta to Kaysville: Is Righteousness Color-Coded?" (DIALOGUE 21 [Fall 1988]: 89–99), for an excellent discussion of the evolution of Church leaders' views on the link between premortal behavior and mortal conditions.

designated those who join the Church as the second level of talent in the pre-mortal life. Unfortunately, however, a conversation I had two years ago reveals the sustained hardiness of the caste system model. After listening to the panel where I first read this essay, Jessie Embry of BYU's Charles Redd Center for Western Studies told me that the center's typist, a BYU English major, had recently arrived at work very upset. She had joined the Church at age ten with her entire family, yet her roommate had just informed her, in all seriousness, that she had not been valiant enough in her premortal existence to have been born under the covenant. Still with us, still damaging — the stigma of lesser status among converts. Sadly, this story counters the hope that a certain world view legitimized by various Church leaders and surviving somehow into the early seventies had, by the late eighties, been vaccinated out of existence.

I would also like to think that perhaps the problem was limited to a small geographical area, perhaps even to portions of Utah. But then I'd have to include Arizona to account for my friend's father who advised converts to marry converts. And then, because a friend from Pacific Palisades recently described to me her southern California upbringing, complete with the teaching that converts were not among the Lord's choicest servants, southern California would have to be added to the list. Now these examples hardly constitute a reliable random sample, but my best intuition tells me that the list could easily grow longer. On the positive side, though, I would like to point out that my friend from Pacific Palisades never believed the message that converts were inferior. Further, she actively opposed the idea whenever it was brought up. She typifies the many Latter-day Saints I know who have long refused to draw demarcation lines on the basis of birth in the covenant.

In contrast, I am embarrassed that, in my own hurry to assimilate, I internalized the very prejudice that had been directed against me. I wanted to marry into a strong Mormon family. I did not want to marry a convert. After all, a convert couldn't be trusted. One day he might present a paper like this one at a Sunstone symposium — and then maybe even compound his crime by publishing his speculations in *DIALOGUE*. Clearly I had lost any sense of the redeeming value of my own heritage, any awareness of distinction in my difference. One Catholic friend still perceives my conversion to Mormonism (and this essay, as a matter of fact) as callous betrayal of my rich religious heritage. I hope that he is mistaken. It is true that, for reasons I cannot fully articulate, I feel pervading discomfort, not appreciative deference, when attending Mass. Still, in my twenty years as an ex-Catholic, I have learned not to discount the legacy of faith preserved for me through countless sacrifices. It has been many years since I have cared to pass for anything but what I am — a convert.

Paula Gunn Allen, Native American feminist critic, wisely notes that “the root of oppression is loss of memory” (in Allen 1986, 213). To the Native American, “rejection of one's culture — one's traditions, language, people” represents a loss “always accompanied by a loss of a positive sense of self” (p. 210). Allen writes:

Failure to know your mother, that is, your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things, is failure to remember your significance, your

reality, your right relationship to earth and society. It is the same thing as being lost — isolated, abandoned, self-estranged, and alienated from your own life (pp. 209–10).

In addition, Allen stresses that a sense of the importance of continuity with one's origins

runs counter to contemporary American ideas: in many instances the immigrants to America have been eager to cast off cultural ties, often seeing their antecedents as backward, restrictive, even shameful. Rejection of tradition constitutes one of the major features of American life (p. 210).

About 1917, in the furor of anti-German sentiment engendered by World War I, residents of Osmond, Nebraska, the environs of which had been settled largely by German immigrants, publicly burned an effigy of the Kaiser. The sight of those flames is one of my mother's earliest memories. How did *her* mother, who had emigrated from Germany seventeen years earlier, feel about the incident? If there is a clue in Grandma's anxiety that her children be American, even to the point of not allowing them to attend Lutheran (and therefore German) church or school, then Grandma probably felt acutely uncomfortable standing there with the other onlookers that day. At that moment, it is likely indeed that Grandma's German antecedents appeared to her to be "backward, restrictive, even shameful."

In a sense, in moving from my Catholic upbringing in a southern California suburb to a Mormon university in Utah, I also emigrated from one continent to another. Admittedly, it may be difficult for a German immigrant to America to value the Old World heritage she left behind, especially after watching her neighbors burn the Kaiser in effigy. It may also be difficult for a Catholic convert to Mormonism to resist anti-Catholic views after reading the book by an ex-priest supplied by the friend who baptized her — or even after reading Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* (and I'm referring here to the current edition). But I believe with Paula Gunn Allen that regarding one's antecedents as shameful in any way is to experience the kind of self-estrangement that leads one to adopt the prejudices of the dominant paradigm. On the other hand, "to remember your position and its attendant traditions, history, and place in the scheme of things" is to nourish confidence and self-esteem.

For me, then, the questions "Where do I belong?" and "What's wrong with me?", questions which dogged my early experiences in the Church, were answered in my quest to learn enough about my ancestors to have vicarious temple work performed for them. Their names are not recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, and their china doesn't glitter from the walls of the Kirtland Temple. They didn't pull handcarts across the plains; they didn't dodge federal marshals in their determination to live "the principle"; they weren't related even distantly to — nor did they lobby to be adopted into the families of — Joseph Smith or Brigham Young; they didn't colonize remote areas of Utah, Arizona, or Idaho; and they didn't try and fail to establish the United Order. Neither, I might add, were they implicated in the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

The Irish Catholics on my father's side endured centuries of humiliation in Ireland — Penal Law, wholesale evictions, avoidable famine — clung to their faith, and survived. And then, with fierce resolve to shake loose the oppression of British rule, some of my cousins even defied church edicts to lend support to the 1916 uprising. They spied while on their jobs in the London General Post Office, hid rebels on the run, and — in an effort to promote Irish nationalism — edited a Dublin newspaper written in Irish. They paid for their involvement by being excommunicated from the church they loved. The German Lutherans on my mother's side fought back both the flooding North Sea and Danish invasions, adopting the motto "Lewer duad üs Slav!" ("Rather dead than a slave!"). In addition, they farmed, taught school, made shoes, butchered, homesteaded Nebraska, and raised large families. But *what* my forebears did is not the issue here. The issue rather is my *knowing* what they did, where and how they lived, and something of both their privations and their dreams. Learning my heritage eliminated my sense of deprivation on July 24th.

So, when a member of my master's committee commented that my poem "Recollections from an Ex" (later published in *DIALOGUE* but originally part of the thesis he was reviewing) had hit him in his guts because he shared the outlook of the poem's male persona, I catalogued his response, but I felt no hurt. I no longer believed that the problem lay in me. Besides, his response was much healthier than that of the singles home evening group to which I read some poetry not long ago. A few of the group were puzzled by the poem. Others engaged in denial, declaring that everybody is prejudiced to some degree, but otherwise disclaimed any connection to the speaker. The monologue itself is spoken by a fictionalized composite of some of the real life people I have already described in this essay, and if I am to believe the readership survey that indicates the small percentage of *DIALOGUE* readers who welcome the poetry it publishes, very few of you will be running into my poem for the second time if I include it here.

RECOLLECTIONS FROM AN EX

*mused in several voices  
to the tune of tinkling cymbals*

It wasn't like she didn't blend right in.  
In fact, based on the type of clothes she wore,  
People always figured she was from Salt Lake.  
Her skirts were long enough, that's for sure.

(Those missionaries may remember her  
As the girl who wore the shortest skirts,  
But that was before Brother Whozit went  
To Long Beach Stake and told them to repent.

Since then her wardrobe's never been the same.  
 She knew the Church had standards — but she claimed  
 Until his talk she'd simply never dreamed  
 That modesty was measured by the inch.)

Then, too, she's not exactly tan and blond,  
 And she really does know lots about the Gospel,  
 Thanks I guess to all those months of meetings  
 When she tried to prove it wrong. Face it.

There she was, wanting twenty kids and a farm  
 In Heber Valley. So it wasn't that.  
 And I must admit she had her share of charm.  
 Really — it was all so much more subtle.

I think of Granddad, how we worked all summer  
 Side by side under Paragonah sun.  
 That's where *I* learned the gospel. A year  
 Busy at BYU just can't compare.

After all, it wasn't me who pointed out  
 The closest thing she had to anyone  
 Who crossed the plains was her father:  
 Left Illinois, *Chicago*, for Balboa Beach

A year before the start of World War II —  
 By *car*. Take Hartman Rector: don't quote me, but  
 That convert's never seemed to have the depth  
 And wisdom that the other Brethren do.

What kind of mother do you think she'll make?  
 She'd be an asset in the mission field.  
 It's just that, somehow, a convert didn't square  
 With dreams that don't dissolve into thin air.

In *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, Elaine Showalter “uncovers three major phases of historical development claimed to be common to all literary subcultures” (in Moi 1985, 55). I refer to them here because I believe their relevance is not limited to literary subcultures. In Showalter's view there is, first,

a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second, there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity (in Moi 1985, 55).



My early experiences as a convert to the Church evince, I believe, a strong desire to imitate and internalize prevailing norms. My poem and this essay represent, perhaps, a “protest,” an “advocacy of minority rights.” And signs do exist that I have begun to turn inward in my search for identity. But lest I depart too early from my stance of protest, let me note that exclusiveness (both the virulent “back-of-the-bus” strain as well as the relatively harmless “glad-I’m-not-a-convert” type) stems from prejudice — unjust, uncharitable, un-Christlike. But prejudice doesn’t result simply from ignorance, insecurity, and fear of difference. Prejudice is also engendered by beliefs.

If we believe that birth under the covenant to a bloodline of proven disposition visibly endorses valor in a pre-earth life, we need to exercise care not to assume therefore that birth outside the covenant betokens inferiority. In the words of Spencer W. Kimball, “Are we any better than those who have been deprived? And who are we to differentiate? (in E. Kimball 1982, 237). In addition, if we believe that a particular factor in our present circumstances — bloodline, church calling, relative’s church calling, family stability, material prosperity, health, or even membership in the Church — functions as a sure sign of excelling in a premortal life, then it would be helpful to recall, too, that a wiser God than we pours out blessings on — and withholds them from — both the just and the unjust. Besides, as James Talmage pointed out, “The things of the earth may not be, after all, the greatest blessings of God” (1908, 992). Ultimately, we need to be careful not to numb ourselves to the possibility that our salvation is *not* secure, and that we may in actual fact have no more clout than the next guy — and, horror of horrors, maybe even less. After all, it is easier to claim special status than to face the implications of loving our neighbor as ourselves. At a minimum, we should remember that even if premortal valor does result in cushy mortality, resting on one’s laurels is not a wise way to prepare for final judgment.

What, then, about Abraham 3:19? *Could* it refer to a hierarchy of spiritual talent in which the group at the top includes descendants of the Church’s earliest converts? I don’t think so. Spirits, it would seem, can differ in intelligence without creating jobs for out-of-work taxonomers. Besides, if Abraham 3:19 does justify self-congratulations for some Latter-day Saints, then two New Testament parables carry an unsettling message to any whose footing feels sure. The first is the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, to which I’ve already referred, a parable which suggests that even those on the bottom rung of the spiritual ladder may one day stand beside those now at the top to receive the same spiritual reward. The second is the parable of the prodigal son, in which the older, consistently diligent son has such trouble making room in his heart for his younger, less diligent brother. In both parables, those who feel they have the special “in” are made sharply aware that God’s definition of privilege derives from more than a tally sheet of who has been around the longest. Greater focus on such messages might quicken the time when converts to Mormonism will indeed be “no more strangers.”

After her mild experience with discrimination at DePauw, Margaret Mead might have limited her view of the source of the problem to the pettiness of

sororities and fraternities and let it go at that. Instead, eloquently summarizing what the experience taught her, she wrote: “Whatever advantages may have arisen, in the past, out of the existence of a specially favored and highly privileged aristocracy, it is clear to me that today no argument can stand that supports unequal opportunity or any intrinsic disqualification for sharing in the whole of life” (1971, 668).

It would be one thing to focus attention on “gaining rights for Mormon converts.” But to do so, I believe, would be to miss the real opportunity. Mead points that out when she explains how an “experience of hardship in some petty caricature of the real world” can “by its very pettiness, [engage] one’s emotions and [enlarge] one’s consciousness of the destructive effects of every kind of social injustice” (1971, 663).

I wish I could say with Margaret Mead that my encounter with the prejudices of some Church members, like her scuffle with sorority selectiveness, led me directly to strong conclusions about how society should not be organized. My own path to such conclusions has been more circuitous. Actually, teaching writing linked to a social science course on U.S. racial minorities deserves more credit for developing my viewpoints on a number of social issues. My own experiences, compared to the intolerable injustice of South African apartheid, seem more like being the last child chosen for the playground jump rope team. Only the imaginative (and insensitive) could see in my few years of vulnerability as a Mormon convert any real resemblance to subsisting on a bantustan (the South African version of our reservations), waiting for your husband’s yearly week off from his Johannesburg job, knowing that you will likely bury as an infant the child conceived on that visit. But if I have been effective in teaching about racism, if, after having their consciousness raised, my black, Latino, and Asian students have continued to listen to a white instructor (and not all of them have), it is due partially to my knowing, even in a small way, what it is like to be discounted for factors that have nothing to do with my value as a human being.

In addition, by not allowing me to become comfortable with my own life circumstances, my experience as a new Mormon convert prepared me to favor preferential treatment for minorities, equal rights for women, comprehensive international sanctions against South Africa,<sup>2</sup> total nuclear freeze to include abandonment of the Strategic Defense Initiative, Navajo self-determination despite the presence of coal upon their land — and public accounting of the Church’s use of our tithing. Given the gravity of injustice on this planet, it is not enough for us to give full-time missionary service in our youth, concentrat-

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<sup>2</sup> I use the word *sanctions* here, as do Joseph Hanlon and Roger Omond in *The Sanctions Handbook* (1987) “in the widest possible sense to cover *all* possible [nonmilitary] actions against the Pretoria government. This includes all [corporate] withdrawals and breaking of links, economic sanctions and embargoes, diplomatic actions, and cultural and other boycotts. It also includes campaigns and secondary actions such as disinvestment intended to pressure others to take action against South Africa. And it includes positive measures such as codes of conduct, aid to South Africans fighting apartheid, and support for the Frontline states” (1987, 194).

ing thereafter on church service and raising happy families. Donating a larger than average fast offering does indicate a larger than average sensitivity, but fast offerings, too, are not enough. As individuals and as a people, with or without institutional backing, Mormons can do *so much more*.

My recent stake president commented once in my Sunday school class that Mormons respond to injustice, poverty, and other non-salvation-related problems by teaching correct principles, while “the world” attempts directly to right the wrongs. I do not see the need to dichotomize so sharply. The world, as defined by my former stake president, includes many deeply committed Christians and other dedicated individuals who deserve our profound respect. Why can’t Mormons aid these individuals — in addition to teaching principles? Can’t we do both?

Most of us are probably not ready today to cross the line at the Nevada Test Site or withdraw investments which work to prolong apartheid. Even those of us committed in principle to such actions may be lacking in courage; those of us ignorant of the issues may continue to avoid them; some who do research them may (heaven forbid) recommend different solutions. But for those of us who, in addition to contributing fast offerings and teaching gospel principles, would like to do more, a good place to begin is by reading the Winter/Holiday 1988 issue of *This People*, an issue that profiles the diverse “ways many LDS men and women have found to serve . . . [and] suggests something of the scope of possibilities” (Smart 1988, 6). Another excellent starting point is Kathleen and James McGinnis’s challenging book, *Parenting for Peace and Justice* (1981). The compelling wisdom of this dedicated couple, issuing from hands-on experience, includes numerous concrete suggestions about how to implement the principles of social justice in our lives — how to teach our children (and ourselves) to be nonviolent and nonsexist; how to multiculturalize our family lives; how to be wise economic stewards. You don’t have to subscribe to the entire “liberal agenda” to get up and clean out your closets, but so simple a step as donating clothing you haven’t worn in the last year can make a dramatic difference in someone else’s life. Similarly, it takes little effort and expense to mount a world map, but doing so can dramatize for children the panoply of different countries — peopled by so many different kinds of human beings — that share the same earth. In addition, using that map to point out such locations as Nicaragua, South Africa, and Ethiopia can help to convey the message that problems relayed by newscasters are very real indeed — and might even deserve precedence, sometimes, over our everyday cares.

For example, on 27 January 1985, the entire Church set aside immediate concerns to join together in a fast for the starving peoples of Ethiopia. One month later, Peggy Fletcher reflected on the significance of that fast in her essay “People of God.” She contrasted our “day of fasting for starving people we don’t know, who have probably never heard the word *Mormon* and may never be ‘golden contacts’ ” with our response to the “collective pain” of the 1960s — Biafra, the Viet Nam War, the civil rights movement — when we reacted “as good Saints had from the earliest times: teach the gospel as best

we can, take care of our own, and trust in the Lord” (1985, 4–5). Speculating about what had changed, she wrote:

Perhaps we are feeling a little more secure as a church. Perhaps we are beginning to recognize the goodness of other people and groups and are willing to join them in acts of global charity. Perhaps our international growth has made us aware of the enormous differences in living standards between American Saints and all others. Perhaps we have come to sense our responsibilities to other peoples as well as other Mormons. Perhaps we are realizing what other Christians have known much longer: gospel truths cannot take hold in dying bodies (p. 5).

I would like to think that Fletcher is right, that “our ward boundaries are expanding to include the world” (p. 5), but four years have passed since we united in a fast for the starving peoples of Ethiopia, four years in which only one similar fast (in November 1985) has been called, four years in which we have spent most of “our tears and energies on our own” (p. 5).<sup>3</sup> If Fletcher is right when she speculates that the Ethiopian fast may have been prompted by the flooding of the Church Office Building with “letters from anxious members encouraging the Church to action” (p. 5), then perhaps more of us need to remind ourselves that we, as a people, have access to great power, and only slothful servants need be commanded in all things.

We could certainly choose to focus on the tendency of some Church members to assume they are better than others, but to do so would only amplify what I see as the larger problem — lack of sufficient Mormon involvement with genuine social injustice. Focusing so much on ourselves can leave little energy for acting on behalf of the victims of oppression. It can even keep us from knowing that injustice exists. In relating my own mild encounters with prejudice as a Mormon convert, I hope I have pointed out a nearsightedness among us which can result in acts of omission potentially far more serious than some acts of commission. Clannishness may have had survival value among unfriendly neighbors, but a church which proposes to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the poor and the oppressed must strive always to eradicate its ethnocentrism — and qualify in the fires of tribulation for that task. Mormons like those featured in the Winter/Holiday 1988 issue of *This People* and humanitarian projects like those reported on in the August 1988 *Ensign* have ignited fires we must choose to fan. As Paul exhorts in his epistle to the Philippians:

If our life in Christ means anything to you, if love can persuade at all, or the Spirit that we have in common, or any tenderness and sympathy, then be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind. . . . There must be no competition among you, no conceit; but everybody is to be self-

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<sup>3</sup> Isaac C. Ferguson’s 1988 *Ensign* article “Freely Given” reports on the many and varied humanitarian efforts funded by the nearly eleven million dollars we contributed in 1985. Clearly, our money was extremely well-spent. But if several more fasts had been called in intervening years, and a significantly larger sum of money had been raised, we might have done even more to forestall the second great Ethiopian drought of 1987–88, which saw “thousands of peasants . . . again on the move, trekking across the parched landscape in search of that bag of flour or handful of beans that [would] keep them going for a few more days or weeks” (Serrill 1987, 35). Eleven million dollars is, after all, a pittance compared to the annual tithing we allot to “our own.” I fail to see why “the Church’s contributions to [humanitarian projects must be] of necessity limited” (Ferguson 1988, 15).

effacing. Always consider the other person to be better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead. In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus (Philip. 2:1-5, The Jerusalem Bible).

Paul's vision is revolutionary. He suggests that we pattern ourselves after a mind that prefers neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, bond nor free, male nor female, black nor white, lifetime member nor convert, American nor Ethiopian, us nor them; he recommends that we model our lives on a life in which principle and practice meshed inseparably; he asks us, above all else, to be *Christian*. The challenge is comprehensive. It should enlist more of us — and waken us all.

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## A Mormon Out of Misunderstanding?

*John Sillito*

MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO I WAS BAPTIZED A MEMBER of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I can't speak for the Church, but I suspect it is safe to say that neither of us has been the same since. It was not a spiritual

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