

The Golden Dream and the Nightmare: The Closet Crusade of A. C. Lambert

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*Once to every man and nation comes
the moment to decide,
In the strife of Truth and Falsehood,
for the good or evil side.*

—James Russell Lowell

ASAE L C. LAMBERT, KNOWN AS A. C., was a professor at Brigham Young University during my student days there. I liked his dynamic style of lesson presentation. Decades after he left the Y, he became known on the Salt Lake City *samizdat*, where his literary works circulated, as the most prolific and least published author on Mormon subjects. During a half century of intense research and composition, he produced an incredible body of material. His major works consisted of some eighteen fat books on the subject, the manuscripts being three to four inches thick. However, by his own decision he published none of it.

All of A. C.'s material pertained to the obscure, arcane, controversial, suppressed, unknown, or sensitive aspects of LDS history and doctrine. Until he left BYU, he researched and wrote in secret, saying rarely a word about it even to his close friends. The reason for the secrecy was his

golden dream, his life's ambition, to become president of Brigham Young University.

His dream became a nightmare of frustration. His passion for historical truth made the dream impossible. But despite it all, he kept his integrity to the end. He never sold out to achieve his golden dream. He made no compromise with his passion for truth in order to attain his goal. And this, to me, is the measure of a man.

After a full life A. C. went to his reward on 1 April 1983. While he didn't attain his personal goal, I would say that the body of his literary work makes him more successful than if he had made the concessions and compromises necessary during that period of time to attain it.

After I followed a girl from BYU to California, A. C. and I became friends. As a matter of fact, he stood as best man at my wedding to Gay Dimick, a gala affair before a justice of the peace at which A. C. and his wife, Florence, constituted the entire guest list. After the ceremony the wedding party celebrated the event at a stand-up joint, then Gay and I caught a bus to Santa Cruz for our honeymoon. Although I took along a dozen manuscripts to work on in my spare time, my literary career stayed on hold until we returned.

Gay and I set up housekeeping in a small cottage at the rear of a lot on Addison Avenue in Palo Alto. The main house in front was occupied by A. C. and his family, while he worked toward his Ph.D. at Stanford. I still remember the superb apple pie with walnuts in it which Florence shared with us. In turn, I shared my weekly copy of *Time* magazine with them. The Depression was on, and money was tight. We could get a good restaurant meal for 30 cents. A steak dinner with all the trimmings was 45 cents. Hamburger was 10 cents a pound, as was Monterey Jack cheese. Our rent was \$18 a month. I was writing pulp stories for 1 cent a word—\$50 for a 5,000-word story of twenty pages—and was glad to get it. Some pulp magazines paid after publication rather than on acceptance but didn't say *when*. After more than half a century, I'm still waiting for payment for many stories. The goal of pulp writers was to hit the slicks, those magazines with glossy paper. When I sold my first article to a small slick I was on cloud nine. While the payment was only \$20, it wasn't a matter of money but of prestige. I was a slick writer, by golly!

The check bounced as the magazine went belly-up.

A. C. had saved barely enough from his small BYU salary to finance his Stanford studies for two years. To supplement the family income, Florence wrote "true confession" stories. At that time I didn't know that she abandoned her literary career because of A. C.'s golden dream. A wife who wrote confessions could cast a shadow on his goal of becoming president of BYU.

The formula for confessions was sin, suffer, and repent. The sinning

was at great length, the suffering and repentance brief. The marketing target was the nineteen-year-old woman.

In sinning, the confessor always said, "I tell of these awful things only to warn other innocent girls to avoid the pitfalls of my mistakes." Then would come a series of steamy episodes in lurid detail, one after another, until the nineteen-year-old reader was bug-eyed and breathing hard, before the suffering and repentance, after which, having learned her lesson and paid the price, the confessor faces the sunset in the embrace of her true love.

I know something of the formula because once, by request of the editor, I wrote a confession, about a young girl marrying an old goat in polygamy. One was enough.

For the sake of A. C.'s golden dream, Florence bit the bullet. She abandoned her literary career, even though confessions paid 3 cents a word.

During A. C.'s second year at Stanford, we moved to a house on Palo Alto Avenue. He and Florence would drop by of an evening. We'd spin yarns, and A. C. would play hoe-downs on my fiddle. He shared my musical tastes—country and classical, nothing in between.

When leaving one evening, the Lamberts got into their car and A. C. started the engine, put it in gear, and let out the clutch. Nothing happened. The car was sitting on boxes, all the wheels missing. He faced a financial crisis until police apprehended the kids who had stolen them.

Perhaps at this point I should point out that the attitude toward truth in Mormon history at BYU is much more liberal today than it was during A. C.'s tenure there. For example, in 1930 Professor M. Wilford Poulson published an article in *The Scratch*, a student periodical, called "An Interesting Old Volume on Health. Background on the Word of Wisdom." In it he quoted from *The Journal of Health*, published semi-monthly at Philadelphia. The issues between 9 September 1829 and 25 August 1830 denounced the use of ardent spirits, tobacco, tea, and coffee in the strongest terms. In fact it claimed, "The most deadly of all poisons, the prussic acid, has been detected in green tea." It also advised, "A substitution almost entire, of vegetable for animal substances. . . . Millions of the Irish do not see flesh meat or fish from one week's end to the other. . . . Yet where shall we find a more healthy and robust population?"

The revelation on the Word of Wisdom was received subsequently in February 1833. Obviously, Joseph Smith was echoing attitudes current at that time. As he said, "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." However, the *Scratch* article contradicted the fond myth (which some still hold today) that such beliefs were unheard of at the time of the revelation.

What happened, a local zealot in Provo (whose posterity I won't em-

barrass by mentioning his name) attempted to have Poulson discharged from BYU and tried for his membership before his stake high council. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed.

Leonard J. Arrington published an article in *Brigham Young University Studies* twenty-nine years later regarding the widespread temperance movement at the time of the Word of Wisdom revelation. No waves; no sweat.

After A. C. completed his studies at Stanford, he returned to BYU and became a closet researcher of the untold history along with fellow faculty members M. Wilford Poulson and Lowry Nelson. Such work was considered anti-Mormon at that time—and, he maintained to the end, it still is.

On a sweltering August day Gay and I arrived at Provo and called at the Lambert home. Blinds were drawn, no answer to the doorbell. We turned to leave when there was a hiss. An eye was at a crack of the door, a finger beckoning. We slipped inside to find A. C. and Florence celebrating the acceptance of his Ph.D. dissertation in the stifling bedroom with a quart of warm beer. We were honored to share the occasion. No one else, no friend, no relative, no faculty member, could be trusted.

A. C. had joined the BYU faculty in 1925 and for twenty-five years did, wrote, and said the correct things to foster his golden dream. During this period he was at times principal of the BYU high school, professor of elementary education, dean of the summer school, dean of the graduate school, and director of university libraries. His Ph.D. dissertation on educational administration at Stanford had the distinction of being published as a book by that school, *School Transportation*. In 1942, when BYU began a Civilian Pilot Training Program during World War II, A. C. chaired the civil aeronautics program.

A hint of discontent came during the post-war inflation, which squeezed the faculty members, including his own family of a wife and six children. He wrote to BYU president Howard S. McDonald: "The curve is up and going higher. . . . Do any of the Board eat meat these days?"

During President Ernest Wilkinson's administration BYU began a program of recruiting returned missionaries as students. A. C. was assigned to missions on the west coast, and Harold Glen Clark in the east. The program was so successful that Wilkinson estimated that the Y would enroll 50 percent of the year's returned elders.

Meanwhile, A. C. was publishing what was to total more than 150 articles on school finance, taxation, transportation, and related matters. In a profession where it is either "publish or perish," A. C. Lambert was very much alive.

However, his closet crusade somehow became known, and his golden dream turned into a nightmare. He left BYU in 1951, joining the

faculty of Los Angeles State College (now UCLA).

The last time I saw A. C. was when he left the Y and moved to California. He and Florence stopped by our place in Redwood City to say hello and farewell. Florence at this time was failing. She'd been sick for two years. I didn't recognize her until she said, "Sam, don't you know me?" I knew her voice. She died soon afterwards, age fifty-two.

A. C. married again a year later. This was of course difficult for his children to understand. In particular, his daughter was outraged. It was she who wrote me with news of her father's death. She said she planned to use A. C.'s materials to write a novel incorporating his many years of research, and she asked my advice. I warned her not to get involved with a "vanity" publisher, who would charge an extortionate sum for publishing while singing a siren song of royalties from a best-seller, but who would end up shipping the entire edition to her to store in her basement. No one would review a vanity book, no bookstore handle it.

I cited the experience of a friend of mine who wrote asking if she should mortgage her home for the \$15,000 the vanity outfit demanded for publishing her book. In this case, she had written a good book, and I suggested sending it to a small publisher who issued it on a royalty basis.

"Regarding your book on A. C.," I wrote to his daughter, "the Bible says honor thy father and thy mother that your days may be long in the land. I am personally highly allergic to kids who write 'Mommie Dearest' books, cutting their dead parents to shreds. My sister Lillian never again spoke to a Provo bishop who chopped his own father to pieces at the funeral. . . . In any event, if you write a book about your father, be objective.

"Regarding the writing business, let me advise you that maybe one book in a thousand which are written gets published. When I was doing magazine fiction there were three great weeklies, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, and *Liberty*. They each had great bins for unsolicited manuscripts—the 'slush pile.' They each received more than 5,000 manuscripts a week, and used only four short stories a week. Such is the competition. When a girl at *Collier's* picked a story of mine from the slush pile the event was so unusual that she was promoted. (The check was \$500, and each succeeding story received a raise of \$250.)

"What I suggest is that you enroll in an adult course in writing, and learn about the business, the attitude as well as the rules, before you attempt a book.

"You might, to begin, bring your ideas about your father's works into focus with an article about him. Query the editors of *Sunstone* and *Dialogue*." Apparently, nothing came of this.

From her I learned of A. C.'s frustration at BYU which caused him to enter the closet. When he was assigned to outline courses for theology classes, "everything he wrote, and any attempts at the truth," she said,

"was immediately struck down," which "only made him more determined to get at the truth."

Originally, it was "his hope and intent" that the university would allow his research "to be used for theological studies, and let students use their own judgment. But it wasn't to be, not even in modest form."

Although frustrated, A. C. clung to his golden dream. He wrote many articles on education for professional journals. When he should become university president, *then* things would be different. For this reason he kept on at the Y, although "he could have worked at any university in the country," she wrote. "In fact, he had many good offers but turned them down, always with the hope that one day he would be President of BYU."

As to his literary activities, his daughter said, "I'm not sure if you have any concept of the scope Dad did in his research seeking the 'truth,' . . . his bibliography on educational matters is 22 pages long. In addition there was a supplement, which he called 'Semi-confidential,' which listed the major works. These were, (1) *Index to the First Five Volumes of the Mormon Journal of Discourses*; (2) *The Blood*; (3) *The Blood Covenant*; (4) *Blood Sacrifice*; (5) *Blood Vengeance and Other Ideas About the Blood*; (6) *The Great Dilemma of the Early Mormons*; (7) *The Epistle of Liberty Jail*; (8) *Which God Gave the Revelations to Joseph Smith, Jr* (plus a section of 90 pages on "The Name of God"); (9) *The Name of God*; (10) *The Ancient Controversies and Mysteries Over the Name of God*; (11) *Religion is Emotion*; (12) *Turbulence and Turmoil Among the Early Mormons*; (13) *The Localism of Joseph Smith's Revelations*; (14) *The Serpent*; (15) *The Ancient Symbolical Significance of the Triangle and the Circle Related Particularly to the Pyramid as a Symbol*; (16) *How the 1936 Abridged Book of Latter-Day Revelations Was Made from the Main Book of Doctrine and Covenants, With Analyses of How Texts of Certain Major Revelations Have Been Changed, Selected and Edited Over the Years*; (17) *What Is Spirituality?*"

As a climax to his research came his final masterwork, the five volumes of *Mormonism and Masonry*. The first four of these contained the research materials used in the fifth volume.

"The above mentioned are all huge books," she wrote, "being 3 to 4 inches thick." She then added, "This will give you an idea of his more extensive works. I have copies of many notebooks he wrote on various religious aspects of Mormonism." In addition to the above list, she said, "One time he destroyed a lot of it in the BYU furnace."

Later, "he began to donate limited portions of his works to semi-private libraries of large universities to be used for serious research only."

She asked what she should do with the mass of materials created over a period of fifty years. I replied, "What you should do, I suggest, is to xerox your father's materials, keeping a copy for the family. Send the

originals to the Marriott Library, University of Utah. Here they will be preserved, well-kept, and will be available for research. You might also send a copy to BYU, but there the use probably will be restricted."

Just why, I wondered, hadn't A. C. published anything on Mormonism? Why had he spent half a century of hard work without giving any of it to the public? An author doesn't write for his own amusement; he writes to be read.

"Over the years he had been encouraged to publish his works," she wrote, "but he admitted that he just didn't have the moral fortitude to face up to the consequences, said he was a 'panty-waist.'" But in the next sentence she gave what I believe was the answer: "I have heard that he was excommunicated, but I have nothing to substantiate that."

I would say that if he *had* been consigned to the buffeting of Satan he would have had nothing to lose and everything to gain by publishing his works. I would also say that his search for truth wasn't an indication that he had lost his testimony, but that, as Juanita Brooks said about her research concerning the Mountain Meadows massacre: "I feel sure that nothing but the truth can be good enough for the church to which I belong."

James Russell Lowell said, "Truth forever on the scaffold,/ Wrong forever on the throne." However, truth when crushed to earth will rise again, and the longer and more often it is crushed to earth, the stronger it becomes when it rises again.

A. C. Lambert was the most prolific and least published LDS writer because he hewed to the line, letting the chips fall where they may. He insisted on truth, facing squarely "sensitive" subjects which the fraternity of apologists avoided like the plague.

A. C. knew of no truth which couldn't be examined, no double-talk which couldn't be translated, no evasion which couldn't be corrected, no stone which couldn't be turned, no mountain which he couldn't climb for the simple reason that it was there. He believed, with Thoreau, "Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth."

And so it is farewell and best wishes, A. C. So long for now, until we meet again, my friend. I'm sure that you now have the Final Truth from your research in the Great Archives in the sky.