

LETTERS

Edwin Firmage Responds

I appreciate Kate Holbrook's willingness to give a serious reading ("A Sacrament of Stewardship," 43, no. 4 [Winter 2010]: vi-xii) to the articles by me and by my wife, Carrol ("Light in Darkness: Embracing the Opportunity of Climate Change" and "Preserves," 43, no. 3 [Fall 2010]: 100-127, 128-66). She raises several interesting issues, which, in another context, might be worth debating.

For me, though, and I think also for Carrol, only one thing really matters. Each of our pieces tries to evoke a sense of what the LDS Church has lost in its headlong rush to assimilate into the capitalist American mainstream. Chief among the casualties has been the commitment to building Zion in anything but ideological terms. For most Church members today, I believe, building Zion is synonymous with growing the Church. But these two concepts are *not* synonymous, as life in Utah demonstrates. Nowhere else is there a similar concentration of LDS population and power. And yet Utah does not lead the nation or the world in any of those dimensions of life that could be counted as essential steps toward a Zion society. This discrepancy lies at the heart of my article on the prophetic Zion ideal; and unfortunately, I don't think I really got this point across.

One of my most important assertions is that the key to building Zion in our time is a timely and appropriate response to climate change, which, if it is anything like what the science is telling us, *is* the biggest moral issue of all time and, therefore, an issue on which

the Church, if it is serious about building a moral society, must take a bold and vocal stance. In doing so, the Church will necessarily take other steps that are the kinds of steps we must take anyway if we are serious about building Zion. These steps include a radical reappraisal of how we relate to the environment and to each other.

I can only lament that *Dialogue* chose not to publish my entire article. In the sections that are available only online (see the blog section at <http://www.edwinfirmage.com>), I illustrate the gargantuan nature of the challenge we face with climate change and offer some correspondingly bold suggestions for what the Church could do to help prevent it. Given the scope and depth of these recommendations about climate change and environmental stewardship, Holbrook's mention that Brigham Young University includes an hour-long devotional each week in its academic schedule (ix) is beside the point.

I'll be impressed by the Church's commitment to stewardship of the earth when every Mormon building and business runs on clean power generated on-site. It is true that the Church, on April 27, 2010, announced a pilot project of four solar-powered chapels in Farmington and Eagle Mountain, Utah; Apache Junction, Arizona; and Logandale and Pahrump, Nevada ("Solar-Powered Construction Design Gets 'Green' Light from Church Leaders," [—
v](http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/news-releases-stories/solar-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

powered-construction-design-gets-green-light-from-church-leaders [accessed February 6, 2011]). But characteristically, the Church is rolling out its solar agenda in a quiet, measured way that will take too long and that misses the chance to speak about the *gospel* of solar power to people in Utah who still don't even believe that climate change is real.

Holbrook raises other points about the social gospel that are essential to Zion. Again, my reaction is similar. I'll be impressed, for example, by the Church's commitment to equality when it launches a national campaign to eliminate minimum wage in favor of a living wage and when it militantly defends the right of workers to organize and equally militantly attacks the employers that exploit them.

On these and many other issues central to the moral gospel, the Church could make dramatic statements and take dramatic action without in any way violating its mandate as a nonpolitical, religious institution. Instead, it invariably chooses the quiet, evolutionary way (if it chooses to say or do anything). And, of course, it continues largely with business—and I do mean business—as usual. While the earth desperately needs governments and businesses to invest massively in clean energy, the Church has chosen instead to invest what is reputed to be \$1.5 *billion* on a downtown shopping center. The Church's Downtown Rising project is certainly a dramatic statement, but not against the excesses of capitalism or for social justice and certainly not about climate change. The disparity between the principles

of gospel teaching and Church practice could not be better illustrated.

Kate Holbrook's response to our articles was thoughtful, kind, and soft-spoken. I appreciate these qualities in academic discourse, but my piece is not an academic exercise. Like my life at this point, it is unabashedly activist. Those qualities of deliberateness and softspokenness, otherwise so appealing, now drive me up the wall.

I find myself increasingly frustrated by the lack of urgency, especially in circles such as our universities and churches where activist energy should be electric and world-changing. During the 1960s, America's universities and churches were in an uproar over the war in Vietnam. The uproar was warranted. In climate change, we face a challenge that makes the Vietnam War vanish into insignificance; but our churches and universities are largely silent as centers of activism.

Climate change is the biggest and most urgent problem in human history. Addressing it appropriately will take the biggest, most concerted, and most urgent effort in history. And for the Church at least, the way to focus this effort is to reembrace the Zion ideal. If my piece inspires others to think and, most importantly, to act along this line, then it will have accomplished its purpose. If not, nothing else anyone has to say about it matters.

Edwin Firmage Jr.
Salt Lake City

Editor's Note:

Regrettably, a typographical error appeared in a crucial symbol in Eugene Kovalenko's "Mind-Changing Fall Issue," *Dialogue* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2011): ix-x. The relevant portion should read:

Experience is one thing; explaining it is another. And I couldn't help thinking in terms of a corollary to

Heisenberg's celebrated uncertainty principle: $\Delta\Sigma \bullet \Delta E \approx K$, where Δ = uncertainty, Σ = experience, E = explanation, and K = some kind of Kairos (not chronos) constant. This means that, if one must explain something *exactly* (i.e., no uncertainty or $\Delta E = 0$), it will be done at the expense of *any* experience (i.e., $\Delta\Sigma = \infty$).