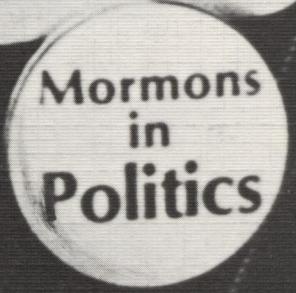




**ERA - Yes**  
**EQUALITY - No**



# DIALOGUE

A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT

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achievement based on their cultural  
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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### time for arts?

I read the "Smoother Letters" with a smile of admiration, but it was often a rather crooked smile as the Chief hit the nail on the head time after time.

It may be that I am geographically too far removed from BYU symposia and such to realize what great things are happening in Mormon arts. I have been close enough to *Dialogue* to know that there has been a real outpouring of both historical scholarship and literary creativity among some Mormons in recent years. I believe, however, that before such an awakening can include or affect many people in or beyond the Church, two things must happen. Mormons who want to create music, art or literature must have encouragement, and they must have time.

The Church itself needs to use its hierarchical organization to encourage creativity among the members—not just road shows and family talent nights, but serious creative endeavors. For the church publications to sponsor an annual church-wide literary, musical or artistic competition is good, but only a small number of people will feel brave enough to enter such a contest, and none but the winners will have their work seen by anyone except the judges. Stakes and wards also need to sponsor creative competitions, "commission" works of art and literature, hold art exhibitions and literary readings, and so forth. The attitude needs to be disseminated that these things are at least as important as, say, an athletic program. Church sponsorship of such events might result in some stereotyping of the work produced, but there is still much to be gained by it. Think of the possibilities if, instead of a hundred productions of "Saturday's Warrior," the stakes and wards could come up with a hundred new plays in the course of a year. Two or three of them might be genuinely good. Such a movement could be set rolling by a wave of the wand, so to speak, in Salt Lake City. We have become a people not much inclined to individual initiative, but we are good at carrying out the church program.

The time problem is more difficult, especially for active members who want to serve the Church and must hold down a job, but also want to do creative work on their own. Members who are attempting serious artistic, musical or literary work, particularly if they are not professionals who are being paid for their creative time, need to be given enough freedom from church assignments that they have time to create. It is much easier to look a bishop in the eye and decline a demanding church assignment on grounds of work or family obligations than it is to say, "I want to write a play" or "I want to paint a portrait this year," especially if one is not already an established artist. I was recently impressed by something in a magazine article on Susan Roylance, a Washington State politician. When she decided to run for Congress, she asked her bishop to release her for the time being from assignments in her ward. He agreed, stating, "We can do everything but take care of your family for you." Bishops are men under pressure to keep a large number of positions staffed and a great many balls in the air, and I am afraid that Mrs. Roylance's bishop is a rarity. But unless we have more bishops who are willing to gamble that the work of a creative ward member may, in the long run, result in a greater contribution than if the member spent the same amount of time carrying out the assignment the bishop had in mind, we are not going to see many great artistic accomplishments by committed Mormons. Ultimately, as most bishops are good men but not mind readers, I suppose it is up to the artists or would-be artists themselves to summon up their courage and discuss openly with their bishops this conflict between personal and institutional needs.

We have to face the reality that much great art has been produced by people who had neither family responsibilities nor a regular source of income which depended on their non-artistic labor. Few Mormons are in that situation, and few of us want to make that kind of sacrifice

because we know the importance of families. Something, however, has to go, as artists are given no more hours in a day than anyone else. If it cannot sometimes be Church service that goes, then of necessity it is going to be the art that goes. For most of us, family commitment is not negotiable, and neither, therefore, is the time and work required to maintain that family. This leaves a narrow range of choices for the Mormon artist when it comes to budgeting time.

It may be that our strong Mormon commitment to families does preclude our ever producing much great art. I hope this is not true. There are things our leaders can do for us and we can do for ourselves that may help us discover we can have both.

Margaret R. Munk  
Silver Spring, Maryland

#### they're everywhere

Wayne C. Booth's article in the Winter 1980 Dialogue was most appreciated. I have for some time been concerned with the reproachful state of LDS Arts in Albuquerque. Church members who have lived here longer than I insist that athletics is the cause. I have demurred until now not knowing just what may be causing this unfortunate situation. Armed with Brother Booth's article, however, I removed myself to the Rare Book Room at the University of New Mexico Library. There, after a short but diligent search, I too found a dull red envelope similar to that described by Brother Booth. The contents are enclosed.

Dear Jock:

Congratulations on your outstanding successes in Albuquerque. The preempting of artistic events with sports activities has proved to be a masterful approach. We have also noticed some important side effects. For example, group artistic opportunities such as choruses and plays which encourage family participation are discouraged in favor of group sports such as basketball. Here women and children are relegated to the sidelines and are led to believe that cheering is somehow an important and rewarding activity. The

encouragement of such values is critical to our success. Keep up the good work.

I must remind you of the importance of continual alertness, however. I'm sure you recall a couple of years ago when we almost lost the ball game, so to speak. You allowed a bi-stake performance of the *Messiah* and a classics concert by local members both in the same year. Fortunately, the comments of the Regional Representative that the classics concert was the best thing ever done by the Saints in Albuquerque has been forgotten. More important, you managed to get artistic decision making away from the women and back where it belongs—with men. Since then, we have done much better. However, until you can get that pipe organ in the Montano Chapel replaced with one of those electronic junkers, it will be a constant temptation to quality performance.

Your request for the invention of new competitive games is being assessed. Preliminary indicators are that we will approve those which have the highest potential for disruptive factors. We note with pleasure that the ill feelings generated between individuals and wards by the competitive sports continues. We suggest that you do all you can to increase such feelings and keep people away from artistic events which, as you know, promote harmonious relationships. Incidentally, getting that local LDS artist and teacher to move out of town was a masterful stroke. It has left both disarray and discouragement among her students. The situation will bear watching, however, as we have been receiving reports that some of those students are still painting and trying to improve their skills and the quality of their work.

You must also keep alive the fiction that athletics is the prime promoter of conversions. Should it ever be understood that the potential for conversions through quality art is far higher than with athletics, we could lose a great deal of ground. Be especially sure that the local leadership never understands the high spiritual qualities of artistic activity and their greater potential for family based conversions.

Finally, we may need to make a change in your assignment. There are disturbing rumors that the BYU Humanities Symposium has begun to have a positive impact on some LDS thinking. With Albuquerque essentially under control we may need you to troubleshoot elsewhere.

Keep dribbling,  
The Chief

Well, as you can see, the fears of artistic minded Latter-day Saints in Albuquerque have been confirmed. Among those of us who struggle with and for the arts, I have drawn the assignment to check the Rare Book Room from time to time in the hopes of finding a letter transferring Jock.

Dee F. Green  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

#### the Source

The most recent "Personal Voices" struck deep chords within me. Like Edward Hogan, I have been forced to "come to grips with the spiritual aspects of the gospel." I had joined the Church while attending a California university, partly in order to marry a deeply committed member, and later found church life in a nonacademic, missionfield setting difficult. However, I too can say that "many of the people who helped me the most to gain a testimony—people whom I now most admire—are of comparatively limited education."

I also felt great empathy for Mischel Walgren, who lay "crying that winter evening." How well I remember my feelings when my husband quietly (it had not been an easy decision) said that he no longer believed in the Church. I remember the effect his years of inactivity and periodic hostility had on our relationship. And I remember when it seemed as though my "agony of fasting and prayer" would be "met with heavenly silence" forever. I too ceased such efforts for a time.

As I look back I am amazed that eleven years have passed since my husband's shattering decision—and I find myself astonished at what has occurred during this time. I look back with gratitude that something, or often someone, kept me

somehow connected to the Church, even during times when doubts, harsh questions, confusion, hostility and depression were affecting all phases of our lives. I am grateful that I did not sever ties even when the "possibility of the downright falsity of Mormonism" was being contemplated at various times in our home. (Is Brother Walgren suggesting that one has not really asked this "ultimate question" unless one reaches a negative conclusion?)

I am also glad that I overcame a stubborn refusal ("What! Another thing for my list?") to keep a journal, as I now possess a personal record which contains an ongoing account of spiritual influence, guidance and affirmation. I cherish this record of sometimes painful and sometimes uplifting experiences which allow me to join Brother Hogan in saying: "Well, I came to realize!" I find, in these pages, a valuable record of the confrontation, study and ultimate prayer involved in dealing with (not necessarily answering completely) difficult questions and challenges regarding the validity and value of Mormonism. I can relish those many gospel-related experiences with peace and love—often surprising ones—which make the absence of the "amiability of coffee, beer and wine" inconsequential. I can enjoy again those experiences, some based upon persistent human effort and some made possible by spiritual influences that still astound me, which made our marriage strong again despite religious differences. And I can marvel at the unexpected changes and events—and see the Spirit's touch behind them—which led to my husband's and my somewhat sudden return to the temple only four days ago.

Brother Walgren feels that people like me are living a "fiction." However, too much of my story was beyond self-engineering. I must conclude that another author has been involved—and that He wants me to be a Mormon in a very real and active sense. Brother Hogan is right. There is a "source that is available to all of us" which can make our lives "far richer and more abundant than we ever dreamed possible."

Name Withheld

### struggling

I guess all of us at various times have harbored some of Kent L. Walgren's thoughts, criticisms and views about Church policies that appear to run counter to scripture.

Surely, through, his accusation or perception that Messrs. England, Poll, Bushman, etc., "are a coterie of intellectual chickens," and that *Dialogue* has compromised itself in order to survive, demonstrates an adolescent yet undeserved harsh critique, accompanied by a measure of sour grapes and immaturity.

Some of his viewed contradictions indicate a lack of historical knowledge. His perplexing question, "How could God be no respecter of persons and deny blacks the priesthood?," illustrates a possible forgetfulness about who held the priesthood during the advent of the Savior on this earth. Only the Jews and a few worthy souls were chosen by God to hold the priesthood, and yet this does not indicate or conjure up any contradiction or imbalance in the Lord being no respecter of persons. All will be accomplished in the Lord's time.

His questions concerning "When and where the temple ceremony had been written," and "how Joseph had received these sacred rites," perhaps deserve some scholarly investigation by a member of the above-named coterie.

There is a blending and justification for some of Mr. Walgren's and Mr. L. Jackson Newell's ("Personal Conscience and Priesthood Authority") concerns and observations, regarding the hypocrisy of some church leaders. Missionary work may be required from the membership, for instance, but very little effort is given by our local priesthood leaders.

Mr. Newell's view that we are perhaps substituting various church duties and programs, instead of developing a genuine Christian character, is sometimes justified. Doubts are created, annoying some of the thinking membership.

Having read both articles, I respond with positive feelings about the gospel. Freedom of the mind and the need to question and express our views in church should be encouraged.

My own experience counsels me that anything worthwhile requires a struggle for acceptance be it in or out of the Church.

*Dialogue*, I love you—

Leon Lambert  
Ontario, Canada

### belief v. activity

I was about to let my subscription to *Dialogue* lapse when the Winter, 1980, issue arrived. I found the articles by Edward Hogan and Kent Walgren most refreshing.

These men have brought to light and eloquently articulated thoughts had by many men and women in the Church today. These are the people who spend a great deal of time actively involved in Church assignments while harboring serious doubts about the Church's claims to divine origins. In Hogan's case these doubts were resolved in the Church's favor. In Walgren's case they progressed to ultimate disbelief.

The fact that both these men were actively involved in the Church during their respective struggles points to a narrowness in our traditional view of our members. We usually discuss members' relationship to the Church in only one dimension—level of activity. We speak of people being "active," "marginally active," and "inactive." But Hogan and Walgren's articles point to a second, often ignored dimension—level of belief.

While belief and activity are correlated, they are definitely not synonymous. My experience as a very active nonbeliever has taught me that there is a substantial body of people at my same position on the activity/belief grid. We talk a lot to each other in private and keep our mouths shut a lot in public. Most of us subscribed to *Dialogue* back in the early days and have continued, hoping that some day it would publish an article showing what Walgren did—that it is possible to reject the Church's claims to divine origin but still love the people and the institution. We remain active and committed to the Church. We serve in MIA's, in Sunday schools, and some of us

are even hypocritical enough to serve in bishoprics and on high councils. Many of us rejoice at the candor of Hogan and Walgren. But most of us prefer to remain anonymous for we have had neither "a mighty change of heart" nor "thoughts on leaving the fold."

Name Withheld

### **new feelings**

This latest issue of *Dialogue* has a new feeling about it. I hope you can continue along these less conservative lines. I was especially moved by Kent Walgren's article. I appreciate his sharing his experience with us, an experience that held no anger or bitterness but much insight and sincerity.

Anne Cullimore Decker  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### **we was framed**

Winter 1980 is a very fine issue all round. I've devoured it in two days and am ready to reread some articles. Might you have extra covers available? I'd like one for framing.

Dick Butler  
Menlo Park, California

### **spiritual liaison**

Either I am mellowing or this last issue (Vol XIII, 4) has focused on my peculiar sensitivities. So far, Calvin Grondahl's graphic wit, Edward Hogan's personal expressions and L. Jackson Newell's pulpit metaphors all refresh my hope for a real "at-one-ment" with each other and others.

In this vein I would like to relate a story about some friends of mine. Last year a middle-aged, divorced LDS man married a young Soviet woman in Russia. Finally, a couple of weeks ago, she came to join him here in southern California. (Neither speaks the other's language yet!) The adjustments for her to our totally new world have been and are overwhelming, and we are all trying to help reduce them to manageable levels.

After a recent local symphony concert she exclaimed, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if our two countries could become united and share our best things with each other

rather than remaining separated by hostile ideologies?" I heartily agreed and thought again of what a millennial event it would be to witness a "marriage" between Mother Russia and Uncle Sam! Can my two friends' adventure be prototypical?—a Mormon spirit and a Slavic soul?!

Eugene Kovalenko  
Long Beach, California

### **once is enough**

Your latest issue nearly gave me heart failure—my first thoughts: "Had Mary Bradford packed it in?" or "Maybe the editorial staff left town with the Carter folks." Then, I realized that the embossed cover must have prevented you from printing the normal "Who's Who of Dialogue" page.

The cover was different, but please don't do a body, especially my body, like that again. Besides, the staff of such an excellent publication deserves recognition ad infinitum.

Ric P. Brady  
Oakton, Virginia

### **means v. ends**

After nine years the Equal Rights Amendment is still being debated in the halls of legislatures and in the columns of *Dialogue*. It hardly seems possible that people would object to the principle that: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." But the Constitution is not a statement of principle; it is an instrument to distribute power. Such is the nature of the ERA: it explicitly grants greater decision-making powers to the federal government and implicitly gives greater power to the judiciary. And on what basis will policy be decided by the judiciary? According to former Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes: ". . . ninety percent of all decisions is emotional. The rational part of us supplies the reasons for supporting our predilections."

Of course, this basis does not necessarily result in bad law. Since the current ERA was proposed in 1971, the Supreme Court has significantly altered gender-

based law, assuring women's rights under the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. Incidentally, the First Presidency did not make its official statement opposing the ERA until 1976, after the Court had established strong precedents for applying the Fourteenth Amendment to gender-based law.

But the ERA—unlike most of the Constitution—would impose limitations on policies, and the proponents' major argument is that the amendment would limit or eliminate economic discrimination against women. Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization of Women, claims that the amendment would do more to help women earn as much as men than any other single law or political act. Showing greater understanding of the ERA's limitations than most proponents, Susan Taylor Hansen (*Dialogue*, Vol. XII, 2) claims only that the ERA "would reinforce existing laws which require equal pay for equal work." But we need enforcement of such laws now, not reinforcement in the future. Even with rigorous enforcement and repeal of all protective legislation, however, women would still be disadvantaged economically since the problem is more social than political. Almost two-thirds of women with young children choose not to take jobs; and this disruption of careers puts such women at a disadvantage economically. And women more often work part-time than do men, almost fifty percent doing so for family reasons. The problems of combining a career and raising a family have not been solved for a majority of women because we continue to shape our jobs around our families.

Most of us do believe women should have equal opportunity; however, one issue affected by the ERA goes well beyond equal opportunity and enforces one view of equality upon all women. That issue is the draft. Opponents and proponents alike agree that the ERA means women will be subjected to the draft; and at least during military service, identical roles for men and women in society would be enforced by law. Because this violates the values of most Mormons, the Church's opposition to the amendment is in essence a defense of

minority rights (though whether opposition to a women's draft is a minority position is questionable). Hansen believes that Congress could so structure the draft for women that it would be compatible with Mormon values. That the draft would be so structured after ratification is based on faith; others may perhaps be forgiven for putting faith elsewhere. But even economically women would suffer greater disadvantages than at present because most women who eventually have children would suffer two disruptions of their careers: one when they are drafted and one when they have young children.

Moreover, under a qualified absolutist standard of judicial review, women would be ordered into combat. An influential article in the *Yale Law Journal* claims: "Neither the right to privacy nor any unique physical characteristic justifies different treatment of the sexes with respect to voluntary or involuntary service, and pregnancy justifies only slightly different conditions of service for women." Women would thus go into combat whether or not privacy could be assured, further violating Mormon values.

The differences between proponents and opponents of the ERA extend to the philosophical underpinnings of each position. Feminists are individualists who believe society can best be served by each man and woman pursuing his or her self-interest. Their opponents who emphasize family believe society is best served when individuals work together for the social good. Certainly a family is not individualistic since its success depends on all its members subordinating their interests to those of the entire family. Nor does a family stress merit, as does the woman's movement, since family members are recognized and rewarded regardless of their merits. In the words of historian Carl Degler: "The central values of the modern family stand in opposition to those that underlie women's emancipation."

But such a characterization implies unity in the women's movement when in fact there are internal contradictions. On

the one hand, feminists seek the resolution of women's problems by obliterating legal differences between men and women. On the other hand, they acknowledge that women have special problems, such as the difficulty of combining a career and child care. The distinction between equal rights and women's rights was made by Philip Kurland, professor of law at the University of Chicago, ten years ago. Both are solutions to discrimination against women, but they are different solutions. The emphasis of equal rights is to eliminate distinctions between men and women. The focus of women's rights is to eliminate discrimination against women while acknowledging women's special needs.

Paul Freund, professor of law at Harvard, wrote a decade ago that: "The issue has always been choice of means, not over ends." The consensus that something must be done about removing legal disabilities from women has not changed. Even those who argue for the ERA often do so in terms of women's rights, not equal rights, and have in fact equated the amendment with women's rights. This equation is faulty because equal rights ignores many issues important to those in the women's movement. Moreover, with or without the amendment, laws adversely affecting women will have to be repealed by legislatures or be declared unconstitutional by the courts, or else they remain in force (whether enforced is another matter). It lies in our power now to eliminate such laws. That we have not done so is due to the diversion of our efforts by the debilitating fight over the Equal Rights Amendment—a means that is publicity-oriented rather than result-oriented. In 1971 Professor Kurland warned that the amendment would indeed divert our energies from the substance and direct them toward the means. He then added: "Only martyrs enjoy Pyrrhic victories." Thus far it is the defeat that is Pyrrhic, for we all have been losers. And the tragedy is that we are in essential agreement on many fundamental goals we want to achieve.

Kathryn M. Daynes  
Greencastle, Indiana

#### intellectual snobbery

I have been of the opinion that *Dialogue* has had, since its inception, a strident, elitist, liberal leaning tone. This was caused by the frequent publication of articles by authors such as Eugene England, Duane Jeffery, Robert A. Rees, Marvin Rytting and Richard D. Poll, who, as a group, seemed to set the mood for the journal because of their condescending and belittling attitude toward anyone who would dare question the superiority of their intellectual powers. I perceive them to be a bunch of snobs.

In recent years, to your credit, I have seen less of the shrill voice coming through. It still does, of course, and *Dialogue* continues to live up to its heritage, much to my displeasure. But judging from some recent letters to the editor, others would say that you are not shrill enough. The editors have an impossible job, just as Robert A. Rees himself outlined in a letter to *Dialogue* in the Winter 1979 issue concerning striking an editorial balance. The present editors are doing somewhat better than he did, however.

As far as the kind of content that bothers me, a subjective observation on my part is that many of *Dialogue's* "featured" writers seemed to have had a preoccupation with themes that, however obliquely, were critical of what they perceived to be the Brethren's reluctance to push for social change. I for one am comfortable with letting the Brethren do what they are called to do: run the Church by revelation of the Spirit.

Best wishes for a successful walk on the tightrope.

Kenneth W. Taylor  
Burbank, California

#### mutual respect

Thank you for your letter explaining the problem of the recalcitrant computer which thought my subscription expired a year early. I would hate to miss an issue of *Dialogue*.

I find *Dialogue* to be a stimulating and thoughtful journal, not only for Mormons, but for those like myself who are interested in the spiritual struggles of people of all religions. You know, in the end, whatever our religious background,

the deepening of our spiritual knowledge comes through struggle, suffering, testing until in the unknown reaches of eternity we come out purified as gold from the fire. I learn from what the Mormons are doing, as I think Mormons could learn from what the Bahá'ís are doing. While I have chosen the Bahá'í Faith as the vehicle best suited to my own spiritual development and to the establishment of world unity and order, I still learn from all other faiths, Mormonism included. Such mutual respect I believe to be the fruit of our belief in the Fatherhood of God.

William P. Collins  
Haifa, Israel

#### uneasy feeling

I have quite an uneasy or at least unpleasant feeling over Mark Hofmann's discovery of an 1844 paper on which a blessing given by Joseph Smith to his son Joseph III is written. Is it another fact of life I should face as a Mormon? I read articles about the news both in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines.

I doubt I can expect clear and crisp explanations or apologies on this problem, but still I want to read voices on this issue in your next issue.

Jiro Numano  
Kudamatsu, Yamazuchi  
Japan

#### an author's reader

A couple of Sundays ago I was sitting in my ward's chapel trying to contour my body to the contoured pew—I never seem to succeed—when a young, 20+, man approached. He gestured toward the vacant space on the bench beside me and mumbled something about being “alone today.” I nodded, noting the wide gold band on his wedding ring finger. He seated himself and a collection of books just as the meeting began. After the sacrament, I was aware that he pulled the latest *Dialogue* from his collection of books and began reading. The speaker

was not that bad—entirely. I was somewhat distracted by the reader alongside me. My mind often wandered to my bench companion, trying to formulate his nature. Well, the meeting ended. My bench companion gathered his collection of books, turned toward me, flashed a missionary-smile, extended his hand, and mentioned his name. I flashed my missionary-smile, offered my Mormon-handshake, and told him my name. He repeated my name, adding “I've read your book.” I thought, it figures. And it does.

Béla Petsco  
Provo, Utah

#### disappearing dialogues

I thought I'd relate to you an incident that occurred re: *Dialogue*. About two years ago, I was in the LDS “Thrift Store” in Santa Ana. While browsing in the large used book and magazine section, I noticed numerous issues of *Dialogue*. They meant little to me at the time, and I was in a hurry, so I paid no attention. Later in the week, I ran across several references to *Dialogue*, and learned the nature of the publication. I telephoned the Thrift Store, and asked one of the male employees to please pull all issues of *Dialogue* for me, and indicated I would be in later to collect and pay for them. He told me, “No problem, I'll do that for you right now.” The following week, I drove the 35 miles to Santa Ana, and went to the Thrift Store to pick up my many back issues of *Dialogue*—a gold mine, I thought! The three male store employees all denied any knowledge of such a publication or my telephone request.

The only conclusion that I can reach is that one (or more) of the employees scanned *Dialogue*, and decided no decent person ought to read such a publication, then destroyed them. Thus, we have both lying and book burning.

Richard D. Terry, Ph.D.  
San Clemente, California

**dum spiro, spero**

Readers may be interested to know about the formation of Por-Esperanta Mormonaro, an independent organization devoted to the promotion of the international language Esperanto, especially in conjunction with the goals of the LDS Church. Those who are interested in the language or the work of P-EM should write it at P.O. Box 7222, University Station, Provo, Utah 84602.

Scott S. Smith  
English Language  
Media Representative  
Thousand Oaks, California

**call for proposals**

for the Mormon History Annual Meeting,  
May 7-9, 1981,  
at Weber State College, Ogden Utah.  
Send one-page typewritten proposals to  
Program Chairman:  
Dennis L. Lythgoe, Department of His-  
tory, Bridgewater State College  
Bridgewater, Massachusetts, 03234  
Deadline: Oct. 1, 1981.

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*Erratum*

The review of Carol Lynn Pearson's book, "Will I Ever Forget This Day?," reviewed by Mary L. Bradford in Vol. XIV, 1, was reprinted by permission from the Newsletter of the Association for Mormon Letters.

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# ARTICLES

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*As a woman editor of Dialogue, I have been pressured with varying degrees of gentleness and impatience to “do something” about the Sonia issue. Long-time personal friends on every side, both before and after the excommunication, expressed their desire to see Dialogue take a stand. As editors of a forum dedicated to responsible, well-documented discussions on many sides of many issues, we didn't feel we could do this. And to be honest, as members of the Church, we found it difficult because we were not in agreement among ourselves either on aspects of the Sonia controversies, or on the ERA or on the best way to deal with them. We polled our Board and some of our readers for suggestions. In time-honored Dialogue fashion, they decided that we were already too late to tell the story of the trial and excommunication itself. Although many questions remain, it would be better to concentrate on issues relating to it:*

- Dialogue should bring readers up to date on Sonia's life.
- Dialogue should analyze the impact of the Sonia case on the Church's public image.
- Dialogue should examine excommunication proceedings and church courts.
- Dialogue should write an account of the Mormons for ERA.
- Dialogue should analyze church and state, morality and politics themes.
- Dialogue should look at the future of women in the Church.

*Some of these questions will be addressed in Stephen Stathis' media update, Lester Bush's analysis of excommunication proceedings and an interview with Sonia Johnson. Subsequent issues will deal with other questions.*

—M.L.B.

# THE ODYSSEY OF SONIA JOHNSON

MARY L. BRADFORD

1936. *Sonia Harris is born on the Waushakie Indian Reservation near Malad, Idaho.*

1948. *She moves with her family to Logan, Utah, where she graduates from high school, works in a bank for one year and then graduates from Utah State University with a B.A. in English.*

The third child in a family she describes as “five only children” because they were so far apart in years, Sonia traveled from one small town to another in the wake of her father’s seminary teaching career. When she was twelve years old, the family finally settled down in Logan.

She describes her parents as scripture-loving people. “My father used to follow me around quoting from church books.” Her mother, who never worked outside the home, held a variety of time-consuming church positions; she was “all the presidents a woman can be in the Church.” Sonia claims she inherited a talent for oratory from her father and habits of prayer and fasting from her mother. She remembers too that she and her mother did all the washing and ironing on Saturdays while the men were “out doing what they wanted to do. I had to pick up their dirty clothes.” She was bitter about that as well as rebellious on other counts. “I must have started out rebellious because my parents went through life being embarrassed.” Her parents dreaded going to testimony meetings with her because they were never sure that the ward would be safe from their daughter’s chastisements. Two incidents were especially memorable: one when she stood up in testimony meeting to argue publicly with an MIA lesson and the other when she was seen after church talking to a polygamist. “Why, you would have thought I’d dropped a bomb on those people.”

Her short stint working in a bank convinced her to return to school. She describes the experience as one that made her feel that she was starving. When she told Alma Sonne, one of the bank directors, that she was leaving to return to school, he scolded her. Women didn’t need an education, he said.

They needed only to be wives and mothers, and a bank was as good a place as any to wait for Prince Charming.

She worked her way through college with a variety of secretarial jobs at the university. In one of her courses, she met Richard Johnson of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, who was shortly to join the Church. In this same course they learned how to administer interest and I.Q. tests, tests which proved to them that they were a perfect match.

*1959. Sonia marries Richard Johnson and quits school while he works on his master's thesis in mathematics and psychology.*

She quit because she thought it was expected of her even though Richard kept saying, "This isn't right. I don't like it." She describes the first two years of their marriage as "miserable" mainly because she was not working on her own degree.

*1960. Sonia and Richard move to American Samoa where they teach math and English at Pesanga Church School, later the Church College of Western Samoa.*

For several months the Johnsons lived in an American compound where their only interaction with Samoans was through allowing them to splash under an outdoor water pump to which they had installed a shower head. One of the young men who delighted in this form of recreation became a good friend of Sonia's seventeen-year-old brother Mark who had come to live with them. When Mark returned to the states, he took his new friend with him to become an *ad hoc* member of the Harris family.

*1970. Sonia and Rick move to the University of Minnesota so that Rick can obtain his Ph.D. in Educational Psychology. Their first son, Eric, is born there.*

Hazel and Ron Rigby, friends of the Johnsons during their school years, describe them as thrifty to a fault, living as they did in a trailer and driving a motor scooter. The Rigbys remember that Sonia bundled the baby in newspapers and braided rugs for their chilly rides to church. They seldom ate out, and when they did, they were likely to look at the prices on the menus and leave. They were "addicted" to badminton and word games, and Sonia acted in ward and university plays. According to Hazel, "Sonia accepted the gospel of women's work," and although she was taking classes herself, she never asked Rick to help her with the housework or child care.

*1963. Rick accepts an appointment at Rutgers. He urges Sonia to finish her degree also. Their second child, Kari, is born.*

Rick arranged to limit his teaching hours so he could be with the children while Sonia finished her degrees. When the Rutgers English Department refused to allow her "hours and hours and hours" of credits from other universities, she changed her major from English to Education. "You're just as smart as I am," Rick kept saying. "You're just as talented." She wrote a master's thesis the first year, a doctoral dissertation the next.



1965. *Richard accepts an American Institute for Education research grant in Lagos, Nigeria. Sonia teaches English at the American International School there.*

Thrift was one thing, poverty another. In Africa Sonia saw the grueling suffering that she was to remember for the rest of her life. She describes her home on a hill overlooking a lovely little valley. "Everybody in that valley was slowly starving to death. If anybody lived to be thirty-five, that was considered old."

1967. *The Johnsons return to the United States where Rick teaches statistics at Stanford and their third child, Marc, is born.*

Returning to the U.S. was culture shock in reverse. "When I saw all those fat people in all those fast food places eating, eating, I came home and vomited."

But Palo Alto was a good place to be. "There were interesting people there then. I was *not* one of them." She especially remembers discussing the Negro problem with a young man who said in a meditative voice, "In ten years the problem of women in the Church is going to make the black question look like child's play."

1969. *Rick's wanderlust takes them overseas again, this time to Malawi in Central Africa (home of "Dr. Livingston, I presume").*

Sonia worked full time at the University of Malawi teaching English, education and drama. She was impressed with the work of the Seventh-Day Adventists in that country, especially their medical contributions: "They must have pleased God a lot."

1971. *Their assignment finished in Africa, they return to Stanford and Palo Alto for the second of their three stays there.*

It was in the Palo Alto Ward that Sonia heard of the directive forbidding women to pray in sacrament meetings and felt the first real stirrings of political activism. "I suddenly realized that the fear of women was strong in the Church." The bishop was unable to answer her questions about the directive, being puzzled himself.

1972. *Rick obtains an appointment in Korea, and Sonia once again finds herself teaching at an American school. She is also called to be Relief Society President in the English-speaking branch there.*

During their stay in Korea, the Han River flooded and buried many of the residents of Seoul living near it. Sonia went to the Mission President with the news that she was organizing her branch to deliver blankets and food to the sufferers. His response shocked her: "What we do here is preach the gospel of Christ." He would help rescue the members, but he would not deliver supplies to the non-members. "I really felt rebellious about that. I

guess I was starting to get 'uppity.'" But Korea also included Sonia's most exciting teaching experiences: at the University of Maryland's Far East Division, at Seoul University and at two Buddhist universities.

*1974. The Johnsons sell their belongings in Korea and go on vacation to Malaysia, where their youngest child, Noel, is born.*

It was a traumatic experience to have a baby in a native hospital in alien surroundings. She lay on a table which was covered with a red rubber sheet in a room where dozens of other women were also giving birth on tables, without attendants. Friends and relatives looked in through the open windows while the cleaning help wandered about. "The native women knew enough to bring cloths to cover themselves. I had naively supposed they would give me a gown to wear, so I was the only bare-bottomed woman in the room."

*1975. The family returns to Palo Alto jobless, but Rick soon accepts a job as part of a traveling team which implemented government education programs in twenty-one states. Sonia is the other half of the team.*

The Johnsons always managed to find a church to attend on Sundays and came to think of themselves almost as itinerant Sacrament Meeting preachers and passers—Eric, just turned twelve, was often the only deacon in the small wards and branches they visited. Sonia trained the children intensively in English, especially in poetry and essay writing. Rick taught them math, and Sonia read to them every morning from the Book of Mormon and other major books. Eric said recently that he "misses lying around on the floor listening to Mother read."

*1976. The family settles in Sterling, Virginia where Rick accepts employment at the Virginia Polytechnic College and University in Reston and Dulles. The Church announces its opposition to the ERA.*

The Johnsons deliberately settled on their quiet, treed lot so that their children could stabilize. One of the first things Sonia did was to call her old friends the Rigbys who had settled in Virginia. She remembers hanging up the phone and saying, "I hope I don't ever get to be like Hazel." It was obvious that her fellow-traveler from graduate school, veteran of ward road-shows and sleepless nights with small children, had turned into a feminist.

She began to think about what she would do next. "I began to think, 'It's my turn now.' I know that sounds selfish, but Rick had helped me get an education, and I wanted to use it." She felt guilty about wanting to apply for full-time work, so she called her family in Logan and asked them to fast and pray about her needs.

Meanwhile, the Johnsons' effect on the Sterling Park Ward was much the same as Sonia's had been on the old First Ward in Logan. A conservative collection of young, fast-growing families, it probably did not know what to make of the outspoken family. "We started out teaching a family relations

Sunday School class, but that was short-lived. Rick couldn't stand priesthood meeting. He said they did nothing but sit around talking about how happy they were not to be women." Rick solved the problem by attending church at nearby Hamilton Branch. Sonia accompanied him for a time, teaching Gospel Doctrine there, but she was "too strong for them, too." Her most rewarding church job—playing the organ—was given her at Sterling Park, so she attended the branch in the morning and the ward in the evening. She was also called to teach Relief Society.

Some of the women liked her lessons well enough that they asked her to teach a poetry-writing class, a class that produced a dramatic poetry presentation in local stake and ward Relief Society conferences. Sonia's own poetry was part of the production.

1977. *International Woman's Year begins. The IWY Conference in Utah was ridden with controversy (as Dixie Snow Huefner's article in Dialogue Vol. XI, 1 describes). Sonia marches in the ERA Parade in Washington, D.C.*

Sonia was ripe for a cause. As Teddie Wood later put it, she was the perfect choice. She was not working except for *ad hoc* editing jobs; she was not well-known; and she was the perfect example of the model Mormon woman, descended from pioneers, zealously active. When her loosely organized group of friends—Hazel Rigby, Maida Withers and Teddie Wood—marched in the ERA Parade in Washington, D.C., Sonia joined them. They and their children carried hand-made signs and wore "Mormons for ERA" buttons. The little band gathered immediate attention from grateful ERA supporters and irate Mormons. "Some students from BYU took us aside and warned us that we were of the devil.

"I never realized before that I needed the women's movement. I thought it was for women who weren't happy and didn't like men. I had always been a happy person except for certain adolescent periods. I had a good husband, good kids and a good church. But when we moved to Virginia, and I began hearing long diatribes from the pulpit about the ERA, I became very distressed.

"When the Church began to oppose ERA, that changed my life from night to day. Nothing had ever been like that before. I had a very abrupt awakening. When I look back, I can see that I had been accumulating data all along. My unconscious was getting fatter and fatter and was about to burst."

1978. *The Church restates opposition to the ERA and to the voting extension (May and October). Sonia testifies in favor of the ERA extension before the Senate Subcommittee on the Constitution (August); Regional Representative Lowe and Stake President Cummings organize Oakton Stake Relief Society to lobby against ERA in Virginia (November).*

"Her language is pointed, sharp and may be threatening to men," Maida Withers says of Sonia, "especially to Mormons who don't know how to relate

to women except on certain levels. When you act like a colleague or an associate, men can't stand it."

Orrin Hatch was to learn the truth of that statement. Because Maida, Teddie and Hazel were all on vacation when the request came for a Mormon to represent the pro-ERA stand on the extension hearings, it fell to Sonia to appear on behalf of Mormons for ERA. Sonia later called it "a great moment in history" when, much to the delight of somnolent TV cameramen, Orrin Hatch "put on his priesthood voice" to rebuke her, and secured in one act all the TV coverage the Mormons for ERA had been vainly trying to attract. Even if her words had been mildness itself, her appearance would have been enough.

But they were not mild. Although she characterized the early Church as progressive about women—"in the forefront of the equal rights movement"—and went on to bolster her arguments with quotations from Brigham Young and James E. Talmage, she warned her listeners that modern Mormon women have been depressed and impressed into service long enough, and that women—Mormon women included—are rising, with the spirit of God as their motivating force. "She is bound to rise, and no human power can stop her," she concluded.

Orrin Hatch, who is always news, focused the media attention on her in a way that was to have debilitating consequences for the Church's public image.

From August to November the Mormons for ERA were more visible as they marched in parades and showed up unannounced at the Relief Society organizing meeting at the home of Clifford Cummings in early November. "When President Cummings organized that awful meeting, I knew what the women's movement was all about." The latest letter from the First Presidency had suggested that members work with other groups to defeat the ERA. The Oakton Stake leadership did more than that. It founded its own group, the LDS Citizens' Coalition, with Beverly Campbell as anti-ERA spokeswoman. The group had been moved from the stake center after Hazel Rigby called President Cummings about the impropriety of holding a political meeting on church property. Julian Lowe, always the reluctant leader on this issue, made it clear that he was worried about the effects of the coalition on those stake members who disagreed. When the women of the Relief Society met to be taught lobbying tactics, Teddie Wood warned them that they would be confronting their pro-ERA sisters in Richmond.

The question of when "anti-ERA rhetoric first translated into anti-ERA action" (to borrow a phrase from Sillitoe and Swensen's *Utah Holiday* article) has still not been answered. Local leaders clearly had the blessings of central church leaders, but when Elder Gordon B. Hinckley of the Special Affairs Committee met with Regional Representative Lowe and Stake President Cummings, was it to organize or simply to bestow blessings? Questions about whether or not participants should be set apart for their jobs, whether or not petitions should be allowed in chapels and whether or not the group should register as lobbyists were also clouded in confusion. It seems to have taken

the Oakton Stake quite a while to arrive at the ground they and the rest of Church occupies now, one where church members are unashamedly campaigning for issues now deemed "moral" instead of political.

Meanwhile, anger was building in Sonia's ward. She was called in and questioned by her bishop about her part in a possible "Mother in Heaven" cult, and about a rumor that she and Rick had struck a member of the newly formed coalition.

*1979. Richard leaves for Liberia for six months. "Mormons for ERA are Everywhere" banner flies over April Conference; Sonia gives her "patriarchal panic" speech (September); Sonia gives her "savage misogyny" speech (October); Sonia is quoted around the country as having advised her audiences to turn away the Mormon missionaries; Sonia meets with Bishop Willis in a "pre-trial planning session" (November); Sonia is excommunicated (December). Sonia and Rick are divorced.*

Sonia's speech to the American Psychological Association in September must have sounded mild to that audience, but it electrified the Mormons who read it. No longer quoting safely from the prophets, she had appropriated the word "patriarch" in a way that easily translated "priesthood" in the minds of her Mormon audiences. She also warned her non-Mormon audience against Mormon undercover agents too unethical to admit to their church-sponsored lobbying activities. Using colorful terms like "mindbindings," she informed the world that the men of Zion were hiding behind the skirts of their women lobbyists. "What really got me," she said in an interview, "was that our leaders were telling the women to say that they were not Mormons."

Since Bishop Willis declines to be interviewed about his feelings and actions at this time, we can only guess at his sufferings. As a young bishop he was reportedly concerned about authority in his own young ward, he was pressured to "do something about Sonia." By the time she delivered the famous "savage misogyny" line, picked up by the newspapers and delivered to his door, the die was cast. When he called her in and showed her a folder full of clippings underlined in yellow, she "felt a stab of fear. For the first time I wondered if I might actually be excommunicated."

Events from then on have been well-documented in *Utah Holiday*, newspapers and other magazine reports. The Church's side was told mainly through press releases and interviews with Beverly Campbell and Barbara Smith. It seemed somehow fitting that Sonia's trial would be as public as it was since her "sins" were committed mainly as public utterances. Whispered innuendos that she may have been guilty of heinous private crimes proved unfounded. Many felt sympathy for Bishop Willis, suddenly blinking in the glare of the spotlight, unable to tell his personal story and being portrayed as a sinister CIA agent. "But," said one of Sonia's witnesses, "I would have a lot more sympathy for Bishop Willis if I had not with my own ears heard Sonia offer to repent of her words and seen him refuse her."

Sonia was to say over and over again that she had offered to repent, that the only thing she cared about was getting the ERA passed, that she was not

advocating the overthrow of church leadership nor even the awarding of the priesthood to women.

Just before the trial, Rick Johnson returned from Liberia. He had previously written his wife and begged her to join him because he had been offered another overseas appointment. For the first time, Sonia refused. Six weeks later he asked for a divorce. She was coping with the shock of this when she heard herself read out of the Church. The public assumed that her political life had driven him away. She was uncharacteristically silent as to the real reasons for his departure, but she maintained that the ERA had nothing to do with it. When he too was excommunicated, reportedly at his own request, she took over support of the children and the ownership of the house in Virginia. Only much later did she connect her refusal to go to Liberia with his defection. When push came to shove it was his career that mattered.

*1980. Sonia begins a busy round of TV, radio and personal appearances, telling the story of her excommunication and campaigning for the ERA. Her appeal is refused by President Earl Roueche and the Oakton Stake High Council; her appeal to the First Presidency is also refused. Sonia signs a contract with Doubleday to write her life story; refuses the First Amendment Award from Playboy; participates in civil disobedience; chains herself to Republican National Headquarters and the Seattle Temple gates; and spends a few hours in jail.*

Sonia's biting humor and flair for the dramatic captivated non-Mormon audiences like the Women's Political Caucus on Capitol Hill, but it infuriated some Mormon women who heard her and reported it to local officials. Earl Roueche, after conducting a private review by the high council, refused to rehear her case. "I really lost respect for the men in the Church," she said at that time. "Not one of them defended me. Not one! If only one had read to them from the Doctrine and Covenants, the rest of them would have had to hear me. Why didn't somebody ask where I was when they held the hearing? Why didn't somebody say, 'Wait a minute. Where is Sonia? Why isn't she here?'"

When she was later summoned to the home of President Roueche to hear a letter from the First Presidency, she knew that that which she had greatly feared had come upon her.

With husband and church gone, she turned more avidly to the public, those 50,000 people who, she says, love her. When *Playboy Magazine* presented her with their First Amendment Award, she kept the plaque but returned the money—\$3,000.00. She said that she could not accept money made by exploiting women in a magazine that portrayed men and women in non-loving relationships. This plaque was only one of many awards she received during the year.

A reminder of what Sonia's friends call her never-failing naivete surfaced when a telegram came from a famous television personage. "Who is Alan Alda?" she asked in puzzled tones.

Maida Withers marvels that during this time Sonia persisted in seeing her fame as so fleeting that she refused to install a second phone to catch the

myriad of calls from the press and public or to seek help in answering the voluminous correspondence that was collecting in stacks all over her floor. "People think she was using the media or that the media was using her. She thought it would all blow over in two or three weeks; that's why she refused to put in another telephone."

During 1980 Sonia continued to assert her "Mormon-ness." The lack of support that she perceived from such groups of Mormons as the *Dialogue* editors and especially the *Exponent II* women hurt her. Meanwhile, she was being discussed all over the Church in terms of fear, loathing and not a little ignorance. The most credible work done on the case by Mormons was the article by Linda Sillitoe and Paul Swenson in *Utah Holiday*. *Sunstone* published another piece by Sillitoe; the New York magazine *Savvy* published an account of Sonia's life and travails by Chris Arrington. Throughout the Church she was developing into a folk figure of sorts, almost as ubiquitous as the Three Nephites. She became a litmus test of loyalty on the one hand and a symbol of the revolution on the other. According to Maida Withers, "The Church perceives her as an isolated character picked up by the media, but I see Sonia as only a participant in a movement, one that has been gathering really for centuries. Women are going to take a new place in society. When the Church took the unfortunate actions it did, of committing money and organization to defeat the ERA, the stage was set for one or more Sonia Johnsons to step forward on behalf of themselves and other women."

*1981. Sonia finishes her book, to be published in October or November; she begins attending church with her children at the local Unitarian congregation; she continues to support her family through public appearances.*

Whereas a year ago Sonia Johnson was still proclaiming allegiance to her Mormon roots, in 1981 she announced that she will probably not return to the Church. She has given up her belief in the One True Church and is searching for a church where her children "can grow up with decent attitudes toward women." She would like to spend the rest of her life pleading the cause of women; she doubts that she will marry again; she thinks she can make peace with her family; and above all, she is concerned with the poverty-stricken women of the world.

At the end of her nomadic odyssey, the question "Who is Sonia, what is she?" still provokes likely discussions at dinner parties and study groups. "I think they excommunicated one of the really true and honest, best Mormon women I've ever known," says Hazel Rigby. One cannot help but lament the loss of this zealous, educated, difficult woman whose oratorical skill got her into trouble. She has used the word "orator" in describing herself, and it is apt. This image was bequeathed her by her father and is congruent with her performance. A reporter's dream, easy to quote, her public utterances lend themselves to the time-honored proof-text method as well. Officials at BYU had no trouble picking out lines from her speeches in a way that left no doubt in the minds of most students that here was a true "rebel, heretic, a thing to

flout," a useful scapegoat for years to come. Sonia's extensive education as well as her experiences as traveler and teacher clarified her natural gifts. Literary and historical martyr images were used to describe her, and indeed she applied them to herself—Hester Prynne, Ann Hutchinson, Joan of Arc. Now, almost two years after her excommunication, the images she chooses are revolutionary heroes like Patrick Henry.

Her journey can be traced and understood only through her speeches, public and private. For hers is an oral style, incomplete without the illustration of her body language and expressive voice. Though Sonia and the other members of Mormons for ERA always maintained that their whole argument was with the Church's political stance, they early used emotionally charged religious motifs. The minute Sonia herself used Mormon religious vocabulary to defend her political stance she stood accused. By the time she had delivered her "patriarchal panic" speech to the American Psychological Association, she had stopped resembling a typical Sacrament Meeting speaker with dutiful footnotes from church leaders and had sounded the oratorical cry that would be her constant theme: Patriarchy.

Some analysts argue that she misunderstood the word and its nuances, that by misusing a word that in the minds of most Mormons is a benign term, she was treading on dangerous ground. Some believed she had borrowed from Marilyn Warenski's *Patriarchs and Politics*, published during the beginning skirmishes of the ERA campaign, a title which was probably coined by the publishers. Though Sonia always claimed that she didn't mean "priesthood," and that she meant "patriarchy" in a strictly political sense—to refer to man's inhumanity to women, words deemed sacred to Mormons—"patriarchal order," "stake patriarch,"—seemed suddenly tainted. Many Mormons thought her use of these terms spelled apostasy.

In the APA speech, Sonia piled up a list of oppressive measures visited upon Mormon women over the years, including "encyclicals from the Brethren which took away women's right to pray in major church meetings." She further intoned that women had been "bootlickers and toadies to the men in the Church." She warned her hearers that although priesthood was not her issue, some Mormon women were getting ready to demand it for themselves. Is it any wonder that the image of a female Joshua took root in people's minds, the trump being the sound of her own unmistakable voice?

Those who heard Sonia in person were usually aware that her harsh words were tempered by humor. Her "Off Our Pedestals" speech the next month was funnier and less militant, and the readings from letters she had received from Mormon women blunted the sarcasm. "Mormon women," she said, "all have the same goal: growth and eventual godhood for all the children of God." But this same speech also included the ill-fated "savage misogyny" line. Hers was a rhetorical style that rallied some but repelled others. Hers was a style that left no one unmoved, and church leaders moved to blot it out.

It is tempting to play the armchair psychologist, to analyze the mind of this true believer of impeccable pioneer heritage and extreme fortitude. Did she feel the need to rebel against the father who gave her much of that



fortitude but always worried about what her actions would do to his reputation, a father she perceived as “punitive?”

“I always wanted to be just like my mother,” she says, “and so that must be the reason I’m not.” She describes her mother as a woman who never raised her voice but was so strong that one of her sons once accused her of “wearing the pants in the family.” Her mother’s deep commitment to fasting, prayer and visionary experiences succored Sonia and helped her survive. It is tempting to speculate: if her father had been as nurturing and approving as her mother, would she have felt the need to overthrow the fatherhood of the Church, or would she have been content to work for change within the system? On the other hand, suppose Bishop Willis and the other church leaders had avoided playing the part of the punitive father? Suppose they had been able to forgive her, even to be satisfied with disfellowshipment (which may have deflected the intense media coverage)?

This cursory look at the odyssey of Sonia Johnson seems to show that when she finally said to Richard Johnson, “Whither thou goest, I will *not* go,” she was paradoxically preparing to begin yet another journey in her nomadic life. In so doing, will she disappear from sight, a passing one-woman show, or does she represent other wanderers now eager to leave the hearths of their homes and churches to seek their religious and political fortunes? Only time will tell.

## *ALL ON FIRE: AN INTERVIEW WITH SONIA JOHNSON*

*Sonia Johnson was interviewed by Mary L. Bradford April, 1981, in Sterling, Virginia.*

*Let's begin by asking you to tell us about the book you have just written.*

My lawyer in California introduced me to a woman editor at Doubleday who took me out to dinner. I told her I would like somebody to help me write the book. It never occurred to me to write it myself. She told me, though, that what I needed to do was go home and think of a possible chapter and write it. Then when she saw the kind of thing I had to say and the kind of person I was, she could tell me what ghost writer would be best suited to help me. So I came home and wrote a chapter which now doesn't exist in the book, entitled "Mother in Heaven." I said, "Listen. I teach writing. I'm not so carried away with myself that I think that what I wrote was great literature. It wouldn't hurt my feelings if you should tell me that I need a ghost writer." She said, "No, you really do need to write it by yourself. We really want your voice to come through."

*Have you chosen a title?*

My working title, which my editor didn't like, was *From Housewife to Heretic*. It sounded too limited to me too. I had been making pages of titles, three legal size pages. The one I like best of all is "All on Fire," a quote from Susan B. Anthony. I was all geared up to push that when she called and said the editorial board thought the other title was just right.

*Will your book help the ERA?*

I hope so. That's what I wrote it for.

*Have you told all in it?*

I don't know about *all*. That statement always has sexual overtones. And there isn't much sex in this story.

*But will it answer all the questions people have?*

The editor said, "I think people want to know where you came from, and why you did what you did. Why of all the Mormon women were you the one?" I said, "I don't have any answer to that." She said, "Why don't you have that as a goal, to figure that out as you write? Think to yourself, this is what readers want to know—where did you come from? Why did this happen to you? It can't be all circumstances. There are other people in similar circumstances, and they didn't do it." I thought to myself, "Maybe I'll figure this out while I write the book," but I still haven't a clue. It seems more mysterious to me now than it did before. That's why I worry about the book because it certainly doesn't clarify anything for me.

Wait—I can't say *anything*. It was good therapy, and it helped me put things into perspective. I started writing it a year ago, and it is still hard to get distance on the events. Obviously it is not what I am going to think in ten years. But it helped a lot. It helped a lot about Rick. I wrote out that story, from the time we met until the breakup. It helped me understand my family better. She wanted me to write about the home I came from, my youth in the Church, and as I wrote, I began to see some sense to it all, a pattern. And while I was writing the trial scene, the tears were falling on the typewriter, the keys so slippery I could hardly type, sobbing away and typing. It was a catharsis. How will it go as a book? I don't know! Catharsis itself doesn't make a good book. William Styron could take all the raw stuff, and make magic. Magic, you know! I sure wish Styron had written it! Wouldn't that be a good story!

*After Dialogue published one of your poems in a recent issue, people said, "She does appreciate what she has lost." What do you think of that statement?*

Actually, I can't even conjure up the feeling I had when I wrote that poem. I am sure it's how I felt at the time, but I don't feel that way anymore, and I don't think I felt it for very long. It was only a year ago, but I felt it less and less as the weeks went by until now I feel that I have not lost—but gained.

Everything that was valuable to me I can keep. What don't I have?

*You don't have your husband; you don't have your membership in the Church. You can't take the sacrament or speak; you can't participate in the ordinances.*

If the ordinances are real, they are still valid. That was a dishonorable trial. These men can't tell God to do things that are not honorable. He is not going to say, "Okay, guys, anything you say, whether it was decent or not, whether she deserved it or not." That's absurd. What kind of a god is that?

God knew exactly what was going on. God knew my heart. He knew what I was doing—He could see it better than I. Certainly, I have more respect for God than to think he would be bossed around or bullied by unrighteous men. In my case they most certainly were that, so I never worried about the ordinances. If they are necessary, I have them intact. As for my husband, I would have lost him anyway. He intended to divorce me before we got the court order. He was having a crisis in his life. He was succumbing to what I call the "Blond Chick Syndrome." It's a cultural pattern. Men seem to feel that they must discard the old one and get a new one. How exciting to find a younger woman! To start off without any responsibilities, no children— young again.

*In an interview you gave us a year ago January, the word had just come out about the divorce. You said something about how you had been too busy looking at the trees to see the forest. What did you mean by that?*

The divorce took me totally by surprise. It happened very fast to him, too. It was a great shock, but as far as losing anything, I still have all the Church's teachings, and I have gained a lot of self-knowledge besides. I feel a deep, inner peace and serenity. It wasn't that I was particularly lacking this before, but I just feel better about *me*. I feel confident about the future. I feel that there isn't much that can harm me now. I have faced the worst and it didn't break me. I feel good about myself and about human nature.

I am not an extraordinary person, so if I react like this to crises, then what does it mean about the whole human race? It bodes well. Really it does. When it comes to the crunch, human beings are more than they know.

*Did you go through some bad times? Depression? Ups and downs?*

Not ups and downs. *Down* and then gradually, continually *up*. Even during the worst times—Rick living with another woman, the Church trying me— everything at its most confusing and heartbreaking, even then, I felt peace right at the core of things and never despair. I felt that I was doing what I had to do. There were no options. This was clearly the path. I felt surrounded by love, not just from the people around me, but I felt that I was borne up on wings of angels. This doesn't mean I felt happy. I just felt sure. I knew what I was saying was the truth as far as I knew it. We don't know all the truth, of course. We know the truth partially at best, but I never told anything that I didn't actually know was true. And that sustained me.

*If the ERA passes, what would you want to do?*

I would like to do what I am doing now for the rest of my life. I wish somebody would pay me all my life to speak for women's rights. That's exactly what I would like to do. But what chance is there? You see, I am supporting the family and I am doing it all alone. Rick let me buy him out on this house, so now I own the house free and clear—no mortgage. It was a decent settlement, but I have these kids and their college to think of, and if I look for a teaching job, it will be because that is what I know how to do.

*Aren't you making enough contacts to give you opportunities for other jobs?*

I hope so.

*Remembering the last testimony meeting in your ward, just before your excommunication—What would you have said, if you had been allowed to speak?*

I remember that I had two things in my mind at that time. I have written it in the book and I hope that I can remember correctly. Kris Barrett had defended me in an atmosphere that was virulently orthodox. Every single person had praised the bishop and had born testimony to the truthfulness of the bishop, a monument to Bishop Willis' courage, his inspiration and his righteousness. I can't tell you how thick the atmosphere was: one of follow the leaders if it kills us! She got up and said she loved me, that I had done a lot of good for her and that she hoped Bishop Willis could hear the right voice. She cried a little. The place was paralyzed. She had broken a taboo. There had been an unspoken agreement *not* to do what she had done. When people break taboos, others want to tear them apart. They all knew me, and they all doubted a little bit, but their doubts went out the window that day. They were determined to be converted. When she went up there and knocked the whole edifice down, you could feel that everybody was furious with her. I knew they wouldn't stone her, but if it had been another day and age, they might have done her in. The first thing in my mind was to get up and say something that would help Kris.

How can I say this—so it doesn't sound like bragging? I inherited a gift for oratory. It came from my father's family. My father's family had it as far back as we know. So I was looking at the audience that day, and I knew exactly how I could turn it around. You get a feel for the audience, you know. I had done it with that same audience the Sunday after I testified before the Senate Subcommittee. As soon as I had come in, I had felt the animosity toward me. I'm telling you, if looks could kill! But I was confident that I could turn them around. And I did. At least half of them flocked over to me, told me that they loved me, that they didn't agree with me but they loved me. So I knew I could do that. And so that was the first thing I wanted to do, that day.

And do you know that afterwards a man walked up to Kris and said, "You make me want to puke." Isn't that sickening? Just because she loved me. Here is this Church where charity is never supposed to fail! Charity failed on every hand. Charity was falling on its face everywhere.

The second thing I hoped to do was to bear testimony to the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ—not the hierarchy, but the Sermon on the Mount and the way Jesus treated women and the poor and the sick and the other people nobody paid any attention to—the despised people. That’s what I thought of. Those things are so beautiful.

I knew that they would think I was talking about Joseph Smith and Spencer Kimball. I wasn’t thinking about them at all. I hadn’t seen any indication that President Kimball even understood what my trial was all about. I wanted during my last time as a Mormon just to be one of them, to participate in this odd little ritual of the testimony meeting that I was beginning by that time to understand. I think it’s meant to bolster everybody’s orthodoxy, to keep people away from fringes of heresy.

That was a long answer to a short question.

*Your friends tell me that they often heard you express sympathy for Bishop Willis and that you put yourself willingly in his power.*

I understand what you mean. As I sit here today, I think to myself—in fact, it just occurred to me now —It seemed that something had to be played out.

*Fate?*

No, not fate. I just felt that I had to do it. All the way along, the whole thing seemed irrevocable. I had to play it by their rules. For some reason I still think I did the right thing. I know there is a lot we don’t understand and that truth is always partial. We get only a glimpse, but I think we know a lot more than we think—in what Freud would call the unconscious—and I hate to use that term because I hate Freud so much—but I think there is more than what we know with the conscious mind. I found that when instinct told me to do it that way or this way. If I followed the feeling, things seemed to move toward closure. Whatever I did do, I could tell it was right, even if it was a terrible experience. I would get reaffirmation that it was the right way. I learned to trust that feeling. Heavens, don’t ask me why because things did get progressively worse!

*You kept going back to Bishop Willis, trying to engage him, and you felt right about it?*

Yes. It all began with my Senate Subcommittee testimony. Later, when I was speaking to a group in Boston, someone asked me a question about that testimony. “Why didn’t you call your bishop or your stake president, tell him you had been asked to speak and ask for his advice?” I told her, “I guess by that time I had ceased to ask permission.”

But I did know that somehow or other the leaders of the Church had to be engaged. I knew that if I wasn’t willing to go to them, they could get off scot-

free. Why shouldn't they have to be immersed in this? It seemed to me they should not be let off.

*So you were more interested in involving them than in saving your own skin.*

Yes, getting them personally involved. When it first started, I didn't know how widespread the church involvement was. I didn't even know my church history. I didn't even know it had happened in the past. You have asked a hard question: Why did I do it? I guess I just felt as if I ought to. It ought to be a difficulty and an unpleasantness for them. They ought to *feel* it somehow. That was one reason—the other was simply that my instinct told me: Go this way.

*When you were excommunicated, were you given any instructions?*

No, none.

*Has anybody tried to bring you back in?*

No. My former home teacher calls every two or three months. He's a busy man. He's a nice guy; if the washer broke, or something, he'd come.

*You know of no particular program for bringing you or your family back into the Church?*

Oh gracious, I should say not. I may be wrong, but I really don't think they want us back very much.

*Do you think you intended to embarrass Bishop Willis personally?*

Oh, I don't think so. I didn't mean to. I didn't feel that I was baiting him.

I first started talking with him about women right after President Kimball announced that women were now to pray in Sacrament Meeting. I had watched in our ward to see if women were praying, and they weren't. So I went to Jeff and said, "You have convinced me that you have followed the prophet in all things, so I am surprised to see that you haven't paid any attention to this latest mandate." So women started saying the opening prayers in Sacrament Meeting. I was content with that for awhile but then I noticed that they were always opening prayers. So I went back to him and I said, "Jeff, do you recall that the prophet said women could say any prayers in any meeting they attended, so how come they're allowed only to give the opening prayers?" He said he felt as if the priesthood needed to end the meeting. "Well, the prophet doesn't think so! Who are you to put yourself above the prophet? That's sexism, don't you see." He could never understand what sexism was. I was always trying to give him examples.

*So you felt you were educating him?*

Well, my daughter was helping. I didn't even know until weeks after that she did these things, but she went to the bishop one day and asked if she could take the microphone around to people giving their testimonies. He was very disapproving: "That is a priesthood function." And she said, "Handling the microphone? Where does it say that?"

A couple weeks later, she asked me, "Does it say that in the Doctrine and Covenants? They didn't have microphones then!"

She went to him another time and asked if she could hand out the programs at the door, and he told her no, that was an Aaronic priesthood duty. She said, "This is ridiculous. The girls don't get to do anything in this Church! The boys get to do everything!"

She was always saying things to me about how they were telling her in MIA class how she was supposed to shine her brothers' shoes or something to get them ready for priesthood meeting. She thought that was ridiculous too. "What does he do to help me? Why doesn't he shine my shoes?" Kari was shrewd right from the start. She will never get a testimony of the Church. Those things stood in her way from the start.

*While we're on that subject, was Kari the reason your family went to the Hamilton Branch instead of your own ward?*

Well, Rick too. He just couldn't bear it anymore. That ward is so sexist.

*Why didn't you go with them?*

Because I was organist and I loved it. Besides, I had a stake in what was going on there. I loved the organ though, and I miss that the most now.

*No one attempted to bring you back?*

Kari had a teacher or two who tried, but the girls in the ward treated her terribly and the boys treated the boys badly. I realize those things are never one-sided, of course. Kids can be cruel to one another.

*Rumor has it that you are never with your children.*

That's ridiculous. I don't go as much as people think. Considering that I am making a living and doing it singlehandedly, I am here a lot. I am home three weeks and then gone for two days, then home for a week and gone for two days. What other single parent can make that claim?

I was on a Philadelphia T.V. show last week where one of the Mormon women there asked, "Who was with your children during all this?" and I said, "I was." She said, "You couldn't have been!" I said, "I was as much as

any of the other women who went down to Richmond to lobby against the ERA!"

*Do you feel bad that your children are not in the Church? What do you want for them?*

I'll tell you what I don't want! I don't want them to learn that only *men* can make decisions, that only *men* are to have revelations from God and that only *men* are real people. I don't want my children in the Mormon Church. It teaches that women are not worthy.

I don't care what you call it. You can call it having a different role. In the end, the message is women are not worthy and that's the message my daughter was getting. At the time I was trying my best to indoctrinate her. I told her that women just have different things to do, but she said we just have different things to do that are just work. We don't make any decisions. We are never given a title. My daughter said, "Do you realize that there are bishops and elders and presidents, but we don't have any titles. We are just nobody."

The problem is not so much that you want prestige as that you just want a decent feeling about yourself. Why shouldn't you feel worthy? You are a daughter of God.

At first, I felt bad. There are a lot of good things in the Church. But now I look at it and I think maybe there was more harm than good. I expect that my sons will honor women in a whole different way than I ever knew any women to be respected and honored in the Church. I don't *know* that they will, but I hope that they will.

*I heard that your son was quoted as saying that he now belongs to the church of the ERA.*

This was my Noly?

Yes.

No, what he said was, "I belong to an ERA family."

*Your friends describe you as a kind of bulldog, a very persistent person. When you find a subject that fascinates you, you follow it to the end. You are not easily deflected.*

I guess that is true of most people when they really care about something.

*No, some people are easily distracted.*

Well, the ERA is what I have been most single-minded about apart from the Church itself. I was pretty single-minded about the Church in my day. I read everything about the Church, by the church leaders or about the church

leaders in my Dad's library. I don't think there is anything Dad doesn't have in his library. If I didn't read the books myself, he read them to me. He was one of those people who follow you around, book in hand, always reading, and reading about the Church. I couldn't get enough of it. I felt a real hunger.

That's how I felt, only more so, about the subject of women's rights. Somebody once said to me, "It seems to me that you are not really very well-balanced. Would you say that you're obsessed?" I said, well, if you mean by "obsessed," would I give my life for the ERA, I guess you can say I am obsessed. And this embarrasses people.

*You see, most of us are not that single-minded. We might give our lives for our children, for instance, but not for an issue.*

I don't think that's true. We know men have been willing to die for issues—civil rights issues. And we think that is natural. We know men are worth that kind of sacrifice. Women have never been considered worth it. There has not been a revolution over freedom for women, as far as we know. Revolutions are always fought for men's rights. If you give your life for men's rights, you are called a hero, but if you talk about giving your life for women's rights, we are all embarrassed. Women are simply not important enough!

*Aren't there other methods of getting our rights? I have heard it said that if you want to persuade somebody, the best way is to model the behavior that you want others to adopt.*

Now, how could we have done that with King George when we wanted independence for this country? When you are not a part of the Constitution, when there are sixteen thousand discriminatory laws in this country against you, how do you model that? Doesn't there come a time to say this is ridiculous? For instance, I am being taxed just as if I had legal rights. Property rights in this country, except for about eight states, are simply hideous! Women are in economic bondage.

I was looking at the Reagan Budget cuts. Did you know that ninety-three percent of the recipients of welfare are women and children? I saw a study by the National Advisory Council on economic opportunity which said that by the year 2000 the people living below the poverty line will be exclusively women and children. We are the poor! We will be the ones starving to death in cold rooms in our old age. That seems to me to be very, very serious. Why, in a country like this, can't we do something about the fact that women and children have hardly any possibilities of climbing out of that poverty? It's time for revolution.

In the beginning, it was the rich who were feeling it—people like Thomas Jefferson were being taxed. Poor thing! Did you read what they had to eat in those days? But it made them frantic that they were being taxed! Those men who stirred up the insurrection had the things that we women don't have,

yet they would not stand for it! You talk about modeling behavior! It was a total insult. They rose up, and we are a nation.

Nobody can believe things are as bad as they are because nobody takes women seriously, nobody, including women. What do we have to do to show that things are bad? In some states women make only forty-nine percent of what men make. The national average is fifty-nine, but in some states, it's as low as thirty-three or forty. In California, women lawyers make fifty percent of what male attorneys make. There is something wrong with that. Bitterly, bitterly wrong. What I am saying is, we don't even recognize how grave that injustice is until we begin to ask, what if men made about fifty percent of what women make? And then we would say, "Oh, my gosh how terrible." If men were living under the situations women are living under today, in two minutes the streets of this country would be full of rampaging, outraged men. They wouldn't stand for it. Women too would say, they can't do this! The things I have found out are hideous, but they are happening to women. I am saying that it matters. It matters to me as much as it mattered to Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry who said, "Give me liberty or give me death."

*So you think that passing the ERA will give women these basic rights?*

It will take a lot of work, but it's like the place in the Bible that says, "Build your house upon a rock." The first thing our forefathers did was to build on a rock—the Constitution. Some people—like George Mason—refused to sign the Constitution because it did not include women. It doesn't include women. It didn't include anybody who wasn't white and male. It still doesn't include us.

Everything we do for women is a lot of work. Trying to pass laws, and then trying to keep them on the books is like building a house on sand because these laws, no matter how good they are, are unenforceable when it comes right down to it. They are ephemeral. A state legislature can vote a law out so it doesn't mean anything.

Barbara Mikulski was so marvelous February 4 on women's day in Congress. She said that asking for equal rights without the amendment is like saying we want independence without the Declaration. Or asking for emancipation without the Proclamation. You must always have a statement of your philosophy first. What we have tried to do in this country is to do without the Declaration or Proclamation, working for equal rights without the commitment of our Congress and our government. The ERA says that we will stand behind justice for women in the courts of this country. Until we pass it, everything else is so much balderdash.

*It seems to me that women feel threatened because it seems to them that if they fight for their rights, they will have to hurt the people they love—their husbands, the men they care about.*

I guess they are shortsighted. In the long run, they hurt people by not doing anything. If you don't move, you hurt everybody. You need a long-range

view, I think, to see how it helps everybody, including men. It is not good for men to be oppressors. It's not good for your sons, your husband, not good for anybody.

*What can Mormon women do then?*

I say that the first thing they can do is find out what is really going on in the women's movement. You see, the Mormon women only know what the Church has said the women's movement is. They have never gone to other women to find out what *they* say they are and what they say their goals are. They don't bother to inform themselves, and I think that's heretical, not to inform yourself. It's one of the things we are supposed to do in this Church, I always heard.

If they knew what the woman's movement is really about—that it's really about homemakers and poor women and about women with children who don't have money or skills who might lose their husbands or have already lost them; if they would really find out what the woman's movement is about, they won't want to fight it. At least, they will learn *not* to fight against women. It doesn't take *everybody* working for something either. It takes a minority. In the beginnings of this country there were fewer than a third of the colonists who wanted to break with England. It always takes a minority to move out and ahead. It just takes the Mormon women—for heavens sake!—to find out what its all about and then to stop getting in the way of it!

I think all women should feel terrible about doing something that they don't have a clue about, accepting men's word without any investigation and becoming total sheep! Now that's the very first time I have used that word. That's the very first time. You know, every place I go, some Mormon woman will rise up and say, "We're not sheep," and I will say, "I didn't say you were." *They* know they are.

*You haven't used the word in your speeches?*

No, I haven't used the word until now. Those are bright women, good women.

*Aren't there women who have looked into it and are sincerely against the ERA?*

I suppose there are, but I haven't met any. I have never met anybody who is against it who has read the legislative history and the intent of the amendment. They haven't ever sat down and read it as it is. I mean never. They have always read it out of Phyllis Schlafly or someplace else. No one has ever read the committee debates on it. I have asked them, and they don't know the document, the legislative history—the Senate Committee reports and the debates. I know the brethren haven't read it either.



*Many Mormons are against the ERA because they fear the power of the federal government and think that if you keep the power in the states you can vote out unrighteous laws.*

You see, that shows how little they know. There is not going to be a building in Washington called the 27th Amendment building or the ERA building. It's not like OSHA.

*What about the fear of federal judges?*

It's an excuse. What they don't know is that those judges right now have no guidelines about sexist law at all. There is nothing in the Constitution to help them. If people are frightened of judges, they ought to be more frightened without the ERA. Those judges can do anything because the Congress, the American people, have not told them what they want them to do. The 14th Amendment leaves it wide open. It's the very thing they say about ERA—wide open to any interpretation because Congress has not spoken. The ERA has the most complete legislative history of any amendment to the Constitution. Congress has said exactly what it means.

*Does that mean that enough states have passed an ERA to create a legislative history?*

It means that if somebody finally brings a case to the Supreme Court, the judges can look at what Congress has said and know what to do. The court traditionally follows Congress. Suppose a case about sex discrimination comes in. They say, "Okay, how does Congress interpret this amendment?" Congress talks about all those things the Church is opposed to. It talks about abortion, about homosexuality, about privacy.

People will argue with this and say, "Well, the court won't pay any attention to that." But it always has! The ERA actually puts it right back into the states. It's only an amendment, after all, not a law. People don't even understand how our Constitution works. The ignorance about it is amazing. Phenomenal. I was ignorant too. I never knew how the government worked.

*Do you see the ERA as a calling?*

I never felt that exactly.

*You don't feel now that you have a "testimony" of the ERA? Has ERA taken the place of religion in your life?*

Nobody assumed that because Patrick Henry wanted his freedom he was no longer religious. People let men do politics and still be religious. Women too can be religious and political at the same time. People must somehow explain me away to lessen me. I can't be both a mother and a patriot. You have to be

one thing—a mother and wife. If you are not a mother and a wife, then you're a women's libber. You can't be a full person with multiple interests. It's more than having a career and a home. It's being full. We are seen as narrow and small without the ability to encompass more than one thing. Reporters ask me questions they wouldn't ask a man, for instance. I am always getting asked sexist questions by people who should know better. You, for instance. If a man had been excommunicated through union activities, would you ask him if the union had taken the place of his religion?

*I might if he were a well-known church leader.*

What I am saying is, church male leaders can have other jobs—as heads of corporations, for instance, and no one questions that or suggests that they should concentrate only on being fathers. Women are treated like one-celled amoebas.

*Getting back to your personal life, would you characterize Rick as the stereotypical Mormon husband?*

In a way, but actually Rick was different. He wanted me to go on to school when I just wanted to be the wife and mother, intending to quit school and go to work to put Rick through, as soon as we were married. The brethren had told me if I did, I would be happy. I took their word for it, and I thought God wanted me to do it that way. Rick's wanting me to go to school bothered me a lot. He always wanted me to go on from one degree to another.

*So he was interested in your progression?*

More than I was, by a long shot. He was a convert to the Church, and I had an awful hard time getting him to go to priesthood meetings. He used to say to me, "Sonia, those men imply bad things about their wives. They all sit over there and rejoice that they're not women. They say things like 'If I wasn't around to help my wife understand the scriptures she wouldn't know anything.'" All this putdown of females. This was years ago before any of our consciousnesses were raised.

It didn't matter to me then. I used to say, "Oh, you're imagining things."

*So in a way he was ahead of you on the subject of woman's rights.*

Very much so. That is the main reason he went to the Hamilton branch. It was intolerable here in our ward. The men were such women haters.

*Do you think you will marry again?*

Oh well, not really. I don't suppose there is much hope of it.

*Why do you say that?*

Well, in the first place, I don't go places where I meet many men. I meet mostly women. I certainly don't feel the need right now, either. I am doing exactly what I want to do.

*What about physical affection?*

It's like a friend said to me once, "Nobody ever dies for lack of sex." They die from lack of love but not lack of sex. If I feel no need of sex now, it's not that I won't sometime in the future.

Someone asked me, "How are you meeting your needs? Who is giving you love?" And I said, "About 50,000 people." Every place I go women are so loving to me and so grateful for something they perceive I've done that I am just overwhelmed by it!

*Do you feel bitter?*

I don't think 'bitter' is the word. I am angry, but 'bitter' connotes that I wish the Church ill as an institution. I don't. I am still angry about the Church's right-wing politics which is anti-women. This makes me angry as the dickens, and I hope I don't ever stop being angry about that. Somebody from a radio station in Arizona called me to ask that question, and I said, I wish the Mormon Church well, but I feel very little interest in it anymore as a religious institution.

*So you don't feel any need to come back into the Church?*

No, I don't think I will ever come back.

*What if the Church changed its mind on the ERA?*

Oh, they would have to change their minds on too many other things. Half the apostles would have to become women. Women would have to be called to decision-making bodies.

*You would like a husband-wife bishop team?*

If the wife could be called 'bishop' and the husband 'assistant bishop!' Somehow or other, women have got to be given their due. I just don't think that will happen in my time. I do feel a need for something, though, and more so lately. Mostly for the children's sake. They miss the ritual of going to church on Sunday and the structure of it, so I am going to have to think of something to do about that. Last Sunday was the first time I really felt this. I would like to find a Quaker meeting. I am attracted to that not because it is the only true Church—the Only True Church concept has left my thinking altogether. But the Quakers are my kind of people—decent people who care about issues like war and peace and poverty and are not hierarchical. There is no bullying

in the ranks; there is no punishment idea—conforming or being zapped by God. But I don't think the children would find enough structure there. If it were just me, I would gravitate toward a congregation where people think like me. The Unitarian Church has good things for children. I will go to see what they have, but obviously, the main thing I will have to do is teach them myself. We talk now about everything: how we live and how to live with integrity—what we owe other people. But they need to be able to discuss these things with other young people in a place where there is intellectual freedom and they can come home and talk about them afterwards.

*If you were going to write your own Articles of Faith, what would you add to what you have just said?*

I think we just have to care about other people more than we do. We must be more concerned that people are living and dying in poverty. I think if we are not concerned about that, then we will not be whole. Even though we are middle-class and never see this kind of suffering, we must do something.

*Poverty seems to be uppermost in your mind.*

Especially among women. It is incredible. The women's movement—and I know the leaders personally, I know Gloria Steinem personally; I know Bella Abzug personally, I know Ellie Smeal personally—these mothers of the woman's movement care about the suffering of women. Whenever the husbands are out of work, or have left or died, it all devolves upon the women. Economic crisis! Women are in it all the time! These are the women who are not articulate about it, who feel powerless, and there are millions of them in this country. All you have to do is go to the places where they come, and my gosh, the misery that is afoot in this land. Sometimes you can't face it.

The reason people don't want to know about it is because it is so heart-breaking. Often when I visit cities, I visit projects like battered wives' shelters. I often ask to visit these places so I can find out what it is I mean when I talk about justice for women.

*One of Beverly Campbell's arguments is that laws are not worded in a way that they can be enforced. She says women must learn to write good laws themselves.*

That's true.

*She says that laws protecting battered wives and others cannot be enforced because they are not written well.*

They are not enforced because the American people don't care enough. People still believe, and the Church still believes, that whatever happens in the home is sacrosanct. If a woman is being exploited there, no one has a right to interfere. It's patriarchy—male rule—and if women suffer, it's too bad because God ordained it. It makes us think that it doesn't really matter to God

if a woman is being beaten and killed in her own home. It's patriarchy, the belief that men are supreme, and once women get equality, then men cannot exploit them. When I say women are in slavery, people say to me, oh well, those are strong words. The United Nations put out these statistics when I was in Copenhagen: Women do two-thirds of the world's work. For that they make one-tenth of the world's money. Now, that's slavery!

*Aren't both men and women just trying to support their families?*

Well, maybe, but there is no way we can make a man support his family if he doesn't want to. Our church talks about how the wife has a right to be supported. There is no right to support. Guess how much property we own in the world?

One-hundredth of the world's property! That must outrage God, and it seems that Heaven must be in total frenzy to get this corrected! I think that's why women are rising.

Back in the days when I still believed in all the church doctrine, and for some time after my excommunication, I thought from what I could see that the Holy Ghost was telling women to rise. The Holy Ghost was telling me! Everytime I would meet women who had had a feminist awakening, they described it in words like a testimony meeting. They were filled with love, and understood where women were and what needed to be done. That's what we call the Holy Ghost.

*Is that what gives you your energy? Your zeal? Does feeling that you are right keep you from cracking?*

I grew up in a church that knew it was right, and now I know it is wrong. So I am very wary of saying that I know I am right or that I've got the only true way. It is so clouded over by rhetoric and convention. We don't see the women in their suffering, the little old women alone in their rooms. What about me? I have no Social Security. I don't have a husband's pension. No savings, and I am getting older. Many women live in one room with no heat, eating cat food until they die.

There are some men in that condition too, but we don't care about *anybody* who is poor.

Women are waking up all over the world all on their own. I met one woman from Africa. She said that as she was walking back from getting water with a bucket, she suddenly put her bucket down and said, "This has got to stop." On their own, before they have any contact with women from the Western world—something is waking women up. It's happening worldwide.

Remember how we used to preach about the rock that was cut out of the mountain without hands? It's like that. Who knows where these women are coming from every day, by the thousands?

*Would you do anything differently?*

Minor things, perhaps. But I did what I thought was right at the time.

*Do you still pray?*

Yes. I pray in a different way than I used to, though. If I kneel down as I did before, it conjures up too many bad images, so I must learn new ways. I appreciate that the avenues between me and whatever else is up there are still open. There is a lot of love coming from somewhere. I feel very kindly toward those heavenly beings.

*In a telephone conversation a few months ago, just after the last LDS Conference, you said, "Mormon women now have the upper hand. Men are now in a precarious position." What did you mean by that?*

How long can men keep up the nonsense that only men should make decisions about how the Church—how the world is run? The whole attitude of the world is changing. It is obvious that women are just as bright, that they can run institutions, and that they ought to have a say in the Church that demands all their time and love. When they fought the ERA, they didn't ask women; they assumed they could speak for women. I think we are coming to the point where women aren't going to let men do that anymore. God would never expect people who are total non-experts on this subject to give advice to experts. Women are the experts on being women, but we are told who we are and what we are and what we must feel by men who haven't a clue—who haven't even had a menstrual cycle! Women aren't going to take that anymore. How can they tell me when I am feeling fulfilled? We are all different! We are not clones!

God made us as various as men. Women are as different from one another as men are different from one another. All men don't want to be farmers. Neither do all women want to bake bread or whatever. Women are to the point where it is harder for men only to invoke God because it makes God look so foolish. And God is not foolish!

Women in the Mormon Church are as safe as in their mothers' wombs right now. This is the time for them to move.

*Are there any other hopeful signs? Like BYU Women's Conferences, where there has been emphasis on different lifestyles?*

Yes, even Beverly Campbell says that! Beverly Campbell is a frustrated feminist! She would like to be on our side, and she may someday be because she says the things we say, and then she has to backtrack and try to make them fit in to the way men meant them. You know, she can't do that forever. Well, maybe she can, but anyway, *Exponent II* finally seems to be saying things without being so fearful. Women are losing their fear. They feel the rightness of it. They are not stopping to equate men and God.

*The new Managing Editor at the Deseret News is a woman. She is a popular choice, apparently, a single woman who has worked hard at her career.*

That is a hopeful sign. I wish Mormon women understood their power.

*Senator Paula Hawkins appears in the Church News with her husband who says he is not threatened and has even joined the Congressional Wives Club.*

Very good. When are the women of the Church going to recognize that the women being held up for them as models are the women they are told not to emulate?

It's a double message: These women who are telling them to behave certain ways are women who are not like that themselves. Beverly Campbell, Elaine Cannon, not a one of them is a woman with millions of kids staying home and baking bread. I think women are beginning to figure that out. The women the men honor are not the women in the home. If they really want to keep women in the home, I don't think their actions show those are the women they really think are terrific.

*Are Mormon men beginning to understand?*

The only Mormon men I associate with anymore are the Mormons for ERA—about 400 or so of them. There are about 1,200 members of the Mormons for ERA altogether.

*I understand that you met Fawn Brodie before her death.*

We sat and ate an ice cream cone on the Northridge campus and talked for a whole hour.

*How did she strike you?*

Oh, she was warm and supportive of me—a lovely person. She said something about “I think you usurped my place as the leading female Judas Iscariot”—or traitor—I can't remember the exact words. We laughed and she said she was not sorry to give up the title. I asked her what it had been like for her. She said it was different for her, you see, because by the time she wrote *No Man Knows My History*, she had no illusions about the Church and didn't believe it anymore. It didn't bother her to be excommunicated.

I said, “What about your family?” Her family was really some family! She said, “My father was always accepting of me, but my uncle—David O.—was really upset.” She told me about going into ZCMI with her father, and his introducing her to some man who said, “Is this your good daughter or your bad daughter?” and he said, “All my daughters are good.”

*Did she give you any advice?*

Not that I remember. I feel so lucky to have met her just before she got sick.

*Did you grow up thinking of her as a hiss and a byword?*

Oh yes, evil . . . evil. Before I met her, though, I had already begun to figure out a lot of things about these people we had always thought of as terrible: Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon. I began to see how the Church interpreted their lives. I understood that they weren't really the way they had been portrayed. I know. I am one. Fawn Brodie was really wonderful, quiet, bright, and kind.

*If women had the priesthood, wouldn't that mean the demise of the priesthood? Who would have authority then?*

Yes, then you would have to consider ordinary people's views and feelings. We would all be considered equally important.

*People could get together and divide up duties and roles? You could just draw lots every time? From what I've read, that's not the way to keep a group going.*

If you traded off on jobs, it wouldn't get to be hierarchical. Now, whoever controls the money is at the top.

*So economics is what lies at the bottom of it? Ownership of property?*

Yes, we need an economic revolution. People say to me, why do you think the ERA is so important? It won't do anything. But they fight it anyway. There are little powerless, poverty-stricken women fighting the richest institutions we have, including organized religion. What I would like to say to Beverly Campbell, if I had a chance, when she talks about how the Church wants women to have equality, I would like her to tell me what the Church is doing about that. I would like to ask her if she believes in patriarchy, and if she does, how she can believe in patriarchy and equality at the same time.

It's another compartmentalized Mormon thing. Patriarchy means that if you are male, you are born into the ruling class. Rulers are always higher, and they keep the money for themselves. This is patriarchy: the men on top the women underneath, economically and every other way. Mormons have splits right down the middle of their heads. "Of course I believe in equality; Of course I believe in patriarchy." I mean schizophrenic as the dickens. They don't know what patriarchy means; they don't know what equality means. They haven't even thought through it enough to understand that they are believing in two ideas that are antithetical. Patriarchy is antithetical to equality, absolutely, totally. Therefore, you can't have God believing in patriarchy and equality at once. If God, the Deity, believes in equality of human beings, then he would not set up one sex above the other.

*Is it possible to have the gospel without the patriarchy?*

Yes. We can still believe in baptism, the Holy Ghost, the laying on of hands, faith, repentance, even the Articles of Faith without patriarchy. I think the Church will change eventually. It will have to.

*What good does civil disobedience do, especially in a church setting where certain civil laws don't apply?*

It dramatizes and symbolizes and helps bring people to accountability. If a person is committed enough to risk and to sacrifice, this helps society change. Because the Church entered the political arena with both feet, it deserves to be treated like any other political body. And if the larger society changes, the Church will have to change too. If there develops too great a dissonance between church and society, then the pews will be empty, and the Church will have to change.

If people finally come to believe that women are truly equal, the churches will all have to change their politics. Now my father, for instance, doesn't believe the Mormon Church could survive if it were not built on patriarchy, that the gospel itself is founded on patriarchy. I, for one, don't care whether or not the Church gives the priesthood to women so long as we get our legal rights.

*One last question: If the ERA had not become an issue in the Church, would you have stayed in the Church, or do you think you might have found yourself in other kinds of trouble?*

I like to think I would still have cared enough about women's rights to want to help them. It might have taken another ten years. I used to care a lot about the blacks but remained quiet about them. Even without the ERA, though, I was getting very disquieted by certain happenings in the Church and religious problems were piling up on me.

*Do you think you have changed? Have you acquired any non-Mormon habits?*

Yes, in fact, I have. I have acquired the habit of free thought.

# MORMONISM AND THE PERIODICAL PRESS: A CHANGE IS UNDERWAY

STEPHEN W. STATHIS

MORMONISM HAS LONG OCCUPIED a unique place in the consciousness of Americans. In the nineteenth century the Mormon Church was all but cast out of America: its prophet-founder ridiculed as a fraud and a charlatan, and his polygamy teachings assailed in Congress as one of the "twin relics of barbarism." Only after the manifesto disclaiming polygamy in 1890, did Americans begin to look upon their strange western neighbors in a more favorable light. Despite the stinging criticisms accompanying the subsequent election of B. H. Roberts to the House and Reed Smoot to the Senate, articles began to speak well of the Mormons for the first time.

During the past fifty years, the publicized Mormon values of integrity, devotion to the puritan work ethic and the nuclear family, genealogy, temple work and proper health habits have propelled the Church to a position of considerable respectability and prestige. Two articles in *Dialogue*\* characterized the sixties and seventies as a period in which the Church's message was being accepted with surprising enthusiasm by most of the media.

Now, five years since the last media update, an entirely different image is emerging. Recently the Church has been confronted with some of the most delicate issues in its history, and these have been reported in one sensational front page story after another. First it was the Solomon Spalding controversy, then the Priesthood Revelation, then an escalating ERA cacophony capped by perhaps the most conspicuous media event in church history—the 1979 trial and excommunication of Sonia Johnson. Since then the pace has slackened very little, for the discovery of the Joseph Smith III blessing just over a year later also achieved front page status. This in turn has been followed by a media controversy surrounding the First Presidency statement on the MX

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See Dennis L. Lythgoe, "The Changing Image of Mormonism," Vol. III, N. 4 and Stephen W. Stathis and Dennis L. Lythgoe, "Mormonism in the Nineteen-Seventies: The Popular Perception," Vol. X, No. 3.

missile system. While feature or human interest stories continue to be published on such topics as the Nauvoo Restoration, missionary work, Mormon athletes, or the Saints in the Pacific and elsewhere, these are proportionately less common than a few years ago. The new spotlight reflects more than a serendipitous series of events: the political leverage of the Mormon hierarchy now is viewed by the national powerbrokers as a potent force—and one which no longer can be assuaged by pro forma photographic sessions at 47 East South Temple or the White House. This development is no less reflected in the recent *Boston Globe* centerpiece headline, “It’s Do or Die for the ERA—Mormon Power is the Key”, than in the unprecedented emergence of the Church as a prime subject for the editorial page, both in text and cartoon. Although the Church is being treated with far greater and more subtle perception than before, its potent incursions into politics clearly has troubled many leading journalists and left them concerned about the future.

#### SPALDING CONTROVERSY

One of the less conspicuous of the recent stories, but nevertheless an intriguing one, was a historical challenge which emerged during the summer of 1977. “Based on the evidence of three handwriting experts,” Russell Chandler, a *Los Angeles Times* religion writer announced on June 25, researchers had “declared that portions of the Book of Mormon were written” by Solomon Spalding, a Congregationalist minister and novelist who had died in 1816.

The three Southern California researchers—Howard A. Davis, Donald Scales and Wayne L. Cowdrey—Chandler explained, some two years earlier had obtained enlarged photocopies of twelve original manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon from the church archives in Salt Lake City. Three prominent handwriting experts were asked to compare these documents with



specimens of Spalding's handwriting in "Manuscript Story," a novel about the origin of the American Indians generally acknowledged to have been written in longhand around 1812. All three of the handwriting analysts—Henry Silver, William Kaye and Howard Doulder—working independently, and unaware of the Book of Mormon connection, agreed that the same writer had probably executed both works.

Soon thereafter *Christianity Today* and *Time* carried expanded versions of the story. *Time* stressed that the researchers were "relying on the sometimes shaky science of handwriting analysis." Edward E. Plowman, however, chose to emphasize in his July 8 *Christianity Today* story that the Church was "slowly discovering that a crisis of truth exists in its roots."

Within days after the first stories appeared, the *Salt Lake Tribune* learned that Silver had denounced the *Los Angeles Times* for misrepresenting him, stating that he would be unable to give a definite opinion until he examined the original documents. A week later, Silver withdrew from the study, first citing poor health and then subsequently accusing Walter Martin, whose Christian Research Institute was financing the study, of launching a "vendetta against the Church." The remaining two handwriting experts visited the church archives in Salt Lake City in July.

In August, John Dart, *Los Angeles Times* religion editor, summarized the Church's first detailed response "to claims that part of the original Book of Mormon manuscript was in the handwriting of a novelist, not a scribe for church founder Joseph Smith." Dart expressed considerable uncertainty as to whether the report prepared by Dean C. Jessee, senior research historian for the Church's historical department, provided any real clarification.

Early that September, Dart learned that handwriting expert William Kaye's study showed "unquestionably" that the documents had "all been executed by the same person." Reaching a totally different conclusion, Howard Doulder concluded in his four-page report submitted two weeks later that the two manuscripts were written by "different authors." Doulder attributed similarities "to the writing style of that century." Howard Davis, as spokesman for the three researchers, told Russell Chandler of the *Times* that he "kind of expected [Doulder] would go negative on the thing because there had been so many death threats." When asked if his life had been threatened during his investigation of the Mormon manuscripts, Doulder replied: "Not at all."

Meanwhile, Mormon archivists were busy assembling a large amount of evidence—some of it impressive—to rebut the Spalding theory. "They scored a coup of sorts," Edward E. Plowman noted in *Christianity Today's* October 21 issue, "when they discovered that a manuscript page from another Mormon book, *Doctrine and Covenants*, was apparently in the same handwriting as that of the "unidentified scribe in the Book of Mormon manuscript." That document bore the date June, 1831—fifteen years after Solomon Spalding's death. Spalding's authorship was also discredited by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, two ex-Mormons and among the faith's most vocal critics, in a book prompted by the controversy entitled *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?*

Given these developments, Edward Plowman's reappraisal of the controversy served as a notice that all was not going well for Cowdrey, Davis and Scales whose *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* was soon due off the press. In his concluding explanation of why the handwriting experts had failed to agree, Plowman, in sharp contrast to his earlier expressions, reluctantly admitted that "everyone seems to agree that handwriting analysis is not an exact science." Less than a week later, *Christian Century* announced that a computer study by two statisticians at Brigham Young University "shows 'overwhelmingly' that the Book of Mormon is the work of many authors."

#### BLACKS RECEIVE THE PRIESTHOOD

A story of far greater magnitude broke on Friday, June 9, 1978, when the First Presidency of the Church announced a revelation confirming "that the long-promised day [had] come when every faithful, worthy man in the Church [could] receive the priesthood." *Time* and *Newsweek* stopped their presses to get the story into their weekend editions. It was carried as well by all of the major radio and TV networks and on page one of leading newspapers across the country.

Although "Mormons get revelations often," Mario S. De Pillis emphasized in the *New York Times*, none have been of the magnitude of President Spencer W. Kimball's announced "revelation from God stating that henceforth black men may hold the priesthood." This involved the "reclassification of a whole segment of society."

News of the First Presidency's announcement, as dramatically retold by Janet Brigham in *Sunstone*, "was electric—it swept through and stunned the worldwide Mormon community faster than the startled news media could broadcast it." Even President Jimmy Carter was moved to send a telegram to President Kimball commending him for his "compassionate prayerfulness and courage in receiving a new doctrine." Howard Sheehy, a member of the RLDS First Presidency, applauded President Kimball's "courage to make this change in tradition," but was also quick to point out that the Reorganized Church had permitted blacks to be ordained to its priesthood after an "inspired direction" from Joseph Smith III in 1865. He considered the decision long overdue.

For De Pillis, this was the "only way out, and many students of Mormonism were puzzled only by the lateness of the hour." While the Church had weathered its most serious crisis since the abandonment of polygamy and now would doubtlessly enjoy even greater growth in missionary work, the revelation left unresolved, in DePillis' mind, "other racist implications of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price—scriptures that are both cornerstones and contradictions."

T. S. Carpenter in *New Times* saw President Kimball's revelation as "the envy of any politician who has ever longed for a *deus ex machina* to take him off the hook." It might well, he contended, "trigger an evangelical offensive in Africa, where Mormon missionaries currently serve only whites in South

Africa and Rhodesia. As for black recipients of this spiritual windfall, the rewards will probably be more psychological than tangible. Black businessmen might conceivably benefit by closer religious ties with the entrepreneurs in the Mormons' billion dollar financial empire."

The greatest beneficiaries of the revelation, Kenneth L. Woodward of *Newsweek* reasoned, could well be the "white Mormon majority" who would no longer have to be considered bigots. "By reversing its long-standing exclusion of Blacks from its priesthood and temple rites," Edwin S. Gaustad, a professor of history at the University of California at Riverside, wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, that the Church had "eliminated a major source of embarrassment and external pressure." While he readily recognized that many still criticized the Church for not permitting women to hold the priesthood, Gaustad was quick to point out that the Mormons were not alone on that point. "Indeed if women are ever to claim full participation in the world's major religions, revelation must broaden its beam to reach well beyond Salt Lake City—to Canterbury and Rome, to Constantinople and Jerusalem, and to the uttermost parts of the earth."

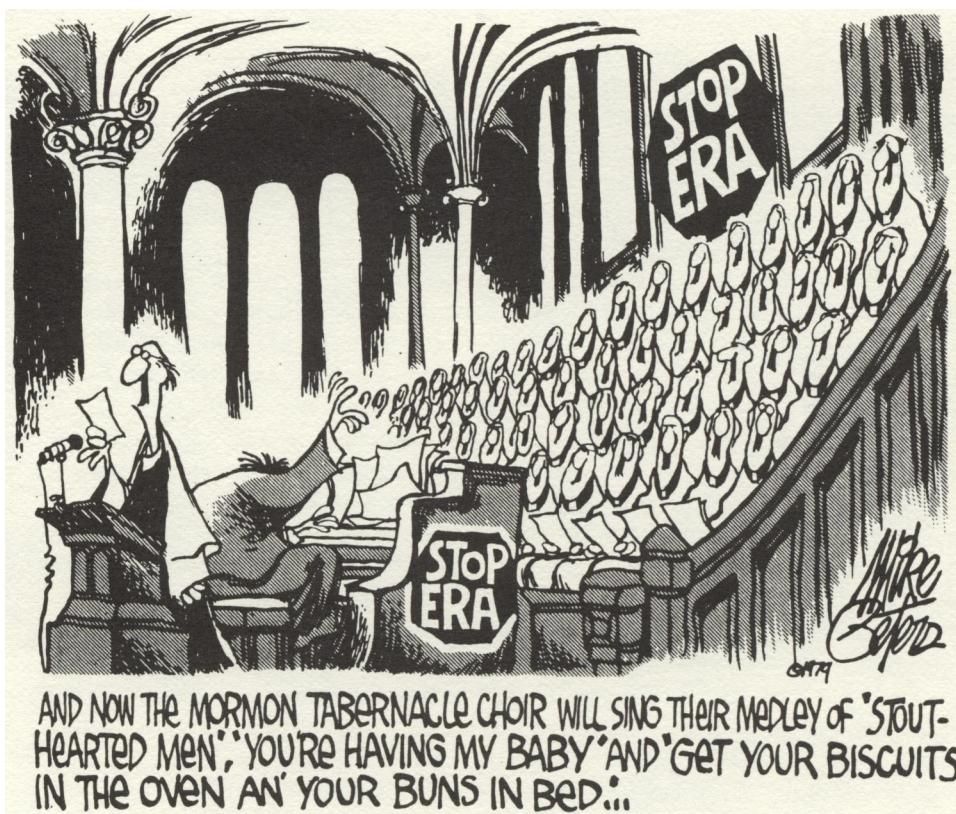
Molly Ivins in the *New York Times*, William F. Willoughby of the *Washington Star* and Russell Chamberlain of the *Los Angeles Times* considered the Mormon Church's decision to change its 148-year-old policy as the most significant action since its ban on polygamy. Others thought the revelation might smooth the way for better relations between the Church and the nation's blacks and provided another example of the adaptation of Mormon beliefs to American culture." David Briscoe and George Buck depicted it in *Utah Holiday* as "a new era of potential brotherhood [which had] opened up in a moment—with its attendant opportunities and challenges."

"Despite the seductive persuasiveness of this interpretation," Jan Shipps felt the revelation would "never be fully understood if it is regarded simply as a pragmatic doctrinal shift ultimately designed to bring Latter-day Saints into congruence with mainstream America. The timing and context, and even the wording of the revelation itself, indicate that the change has to do not with America so much as with the world."

Revelations in Mormonism are generally the products of a lengthy process, Shipps told *Christian Century* readers. "During the 1960s the Church was under tremendous pressure from its critics on this issue. Early in the 1970s "liberal Latter-day Saints agitated the issue from within." What prompted "President Kimball and his counselors to spend many hours in the Upper Room of the Temple pleading long and earnestly for divine guidance did not stem from a messy situation with blacks picketing the Church's annual conference in Salt Lake City, but was 'the expansion of the work of the Lord over the earth.'"<sup>1</sup>

#### ERA AND SONIA JOHNSON

By the fall of 1979, another of the Church's alleged prejudices captured the media's imagination as Marion Callister, a Federal judge in the U.S. District Court in Boise, and also a regional representative of the Church, refused to



disqualify himself in the case of *Idaho et al. v. Freeman*, wherein Idaho and Arizona, plus four Washington state congressmen, challenged the constitutionality of Congress' extension of the deadline for ERA ratification. They sought validation of a state's right to rescind an earlier ratification.

The Mormon-ERA connection, of course was not a subject new to the media. Articles had appeared on the general theme for much of the 1970s. Lisa Cronin Wohl, for example, focused on the Church's anti-ERA lobbying efforts in Nevada in the July 1977 *Ms*, to dramatize how "church participation on the ERA went way beyond the bounds of merely encouraging its members to vote."

When "Mormons for ERA" was formed in 1978, it introduced a prominent subtheme into the coverage. Lynn Simross, *Los Angeles Times* staff writer, in a lengthy May 1979 piece, described feminist Mormon supporters of ERA as having "disrupted the Mormon patriarchy. And because of this, they say, among women there is schizophrenia in Zion." Using virtually the same language, Virginia Culver, the *Denver Post's* religion editor, saw "feminists in the Mormon Church walking a tightrope. They feel loyalty to their church and believe its tenets. But they want some changes, some loosening up." Although some think they can handle this balancing act, "others are uncertain about whether to stay and try to change the church dictums or to leave."

The Callister controversy stimulated considerable editorial comment as well. "Perhaps Judge Callister can weigh the merits pro and con on the ERA ratification extension to the satisfaction of all parties," the *Kansas City Times* declared, "but it seems highly unlikely. Regardless of his approach, it will be difficult for him to convey the appearance of justice in a decision for or against ERA." That, according to the *Times*, was because his church is so "deeply involved in opposing the issue before him and he is so deeply involved in his church."

While the *Philadelphia Inquirer* considered it inappropriate "to set a precedent whereby an individual judge's private religious beliefs could be used to disqualify him from a case would be a grievous mistake . . . the Mormon Church's active opposition to the ERA coupled with Judge Callister's position of leadership in the Church" made this a special case. The *Detroit News* likewise conceded that "it would be a grievous error to assume that a judge's religious beliefs render him incapable of impartiality," but was adamant in insisting that Callister should step aside.

Callister's "presence in the courtroom," the *Boston Globe* argued, "would certainly color, and possibly distort the proceedings. And supposing Callister was found in favor of ERA? Would he then find himself in the same untenable position as [recently excommunicated Mormon ERA exponent] Sonia Johnson? Would he face a reprimand or punishment from his church?"

The *New York Times* thought it was "entirely reasonable" for supporters of the ERA to be worried that Judge Callister's "high church rank and duties might influence his judgment on a matter of such importance to the Mormon high command." Courts everywhere would eventually have to face the serious issue which this case raised.

If Judge Callister were merely a member of the Mormon Church," columnist Ellen Goodman suggested, "it would be inappropriate to criticize his capacity for objectivity." The problem stems from Callister's position as a "church decisionmaker, several rungs higher than the bishop who excommunicated Sonia Johnson. He was part of the inner circle that has already passed judgment on the extension and rescission issues."

Taking exception, Ronald Goetz in the January 1980 *Christian Century* characterized the movement to remove Callister as an "effort to amend the U.S. Constitution toward greater human liberation and justice" while at the same time trampling on "some of our already-won, longstanding constitutional rights." "Surely," Goetz reasoned, "the guarantee of religious liberty is threatened in this attempt to exclude Judge Callister."

Despite its avowed support for ERA, the *Los Angeles Times* also declared that "it would be a serious mistake for the Justice Department to ask formally for Callister's disqualification. . . . American jurisprudence is based on the assumption that a judge can indeed separate state and church in his official duties."

If Callister "is forced to disqualify himself," Patrick Buchanan proclaimed late in 1979, "a nasty precedent will be established." Catholic judges as well as other jurists would as a consequence also be asked to disqualify themselves

from cases ranging from abortion to annual appeals asking for removal of Christmas celebrations from the public schools. "And what of the adherents of our secular faith?"

Among his fellow Idahoans who knew Callister best, the *New York Times's* Molly Ivins reported "little alarm or indignation." Even Senator Frank Church, an Idaho Democrat, and Republican Steve Symms, who would subsequently unseat him in 1980, and who "managed to disagree about almost everything," were "united in their support for Judge Callister."

Even Callister's release as a regional representative, however, did little to temper the opposition. As the controversy surrounding Judge Callister intensified, another Mormon emerged as a major focal point of media attention. Mormonism—so far as the media was concerned—never had had a woman quite like Sonia Johnson, or at least not one as newsworthy. Sonia Johnson's "dilemma," as the *Boston Globe* characterized it, dramatized "one that many men and women have lived in recent years as they have been pushed to weigh their own beliefs against the sometimes contradictory tenets of their religions." The questions confronting Sonia, the *Globe's* Ellen Goodman contended, were "important to every woman and man who believes in equal rights and belong to a church opposed to them," important to anyone who had ever "felt uplifted by religious beliefs and put down by religious institutions."

By far the most prevalent charge against the Church was that of mixing religion and politics. Barbara Howard in her February 1980 *Christian Century* profile on "Sonia and Mormon Political Power," seriously questioned the right of any church "to engage in political activities under banners other than their own." Using such tactics, wealthy institutions such as the Mormon Church could influence "decisions affecting numbers of people who are unaware that the opposition is not political, but religious."

As a consequence, Sonia Johnson's excommunication "may need to be looked at more closely—not simply because of the ERA but also because the Constitution does call for responsible relationships between religious institutions and governmental powers." This case also, according to Cari Beauchamp, of the National Women's Political Census, emphasized the legal problems the Church might face by using their tax-exempt funds for lobbying and political purposes.

For Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post*, the "dispute with Johnson [was] not over something like liturgy, but over the ERA, which is after all, about the rights of women. When the Mormon Church went after Johnson, it attempted to silence a voice—not just a Mormon voice, but a voice. If the Church succeeds, not just Mormon women will suffer, but women in general." By making a political issue into a religious one, Solveig Torvig told *Newsday* readers late in 1979, the Mormon Church had removed its "mantle of holiness" and made its "theology and motives fair game for political dissection in the temporal arena." It was a pure and simple case of "intolerable male arrogance."

A few weeks later, Linda Sillitoe and Paul Swenson used *Utah Holiday* to show how Sonia's excommunication had "dramatized for the nation the

outward LDS Church political activities surrounding the Equal Rights Amendment, and the struggle of individual conscience vs. group loyalty within the Church." Sillitoe in a subsequent article, published by *Sunstone*, portrayed the "current polarization among Church members as understandable." Many, she explained, saw Sonia's troubles resulted not from ERA, but from a lack of "obedience and loyalty to the Church." Others considered her "separation of the political and spiritual aspects as valid and for her—and possibly for themselves—necessary."

Using equally forceful language, Chris Rigby Arrington depicted Sonia's battle as a "political one, but the air around it [was] fused with religion, and there is a complex, spiritual foundation to her convictions." Arrington stressed in the October 1980 *Savvy* her belief that "for years to come when Americans think of Mormonism, they will think of Sonia Johnson before they think of polygamy or the Tabernacle Choir."

The *Chicago Tribune's* Charles Madigan characterized the charges against Sonia as a "throwback to the era of the Spanish Inquisition: knowingly preaching false doctrine, undermining the Church's missionary efforts and its authority." London's *Economist* considered the whole process to be "latter-day bigotry" and emphasized that the "place of women in the Mormon Church is not high."

A few writers, such as Jan Shipps, attempted to provide a broader basis for understanding Mormon Excommunication. Shipps' January 1980 *Christian Century* article focused first on the importance of the nuclear family as the basic unit in Mormon culture, and then explained that "any threat to the traditional structure of the family is . . . likely to be perceived as a threat to Mormonism itself." Because Sonia's excommunication had received so much attention, people everywhere had heard the "message that Latter-day Saints really care about what happens to the family." Whether, as a result, "there will be a more than ordinarily abundant Mormon harvest of American converts remains to be seen."

Similar observations were espoused by David Macfarlane in the January 1980 *Maclean's*. ERA, as far as the Church was concerned, was not "primarily a political or legal issue but a moral one, as fundamental as they come, and well within its jurisdiction." Johnson and her ERA supporters, however, saw things differently. "They believe that ERA will only strengthen the family by strengthening the position of the mother. Furthermore the issue of ERA, in their view, is a political one, not subject to interpretation by scripture."

Both opponents and supporters agree, Macfarlane concluded, that "ERA will have a significant impact on U.S. constitutional litigation and judicial decisions. It will have far-reaching effects on the structure of American society, and the Mormons fear—not unreasonably—that the family will bear the brunt of the social upheaval."

Looking at the excommunication as a necessary and positive decision, syndicated columnist Patrick Buchanan called Bishop Jeffrey Willis "the real hero," and Sonia "our newest media martyr." Traditionally, Buchanan explained, religious martyrs "are men and women who surrender their lives

rather than deny or contravene the teachings of their faith. In modern times, a media martyr is an individual involved in a popular and trendy cause whose fate customarily includes a sympathetic shot on 'Good Morning America' or the 'Today Show.'

No one demanded that Sonia "stop talking about ERA," Buchanan argued. "She was only asked to cease assaulting the church structure, defying church doctrine and distorting church teaching. If she could not agree to that, she should have been excommunicated." Instead, she "quite obviously preferred to become a publicized heroine of the feminist movement than to remain a member in good standing of the Mormon Church."

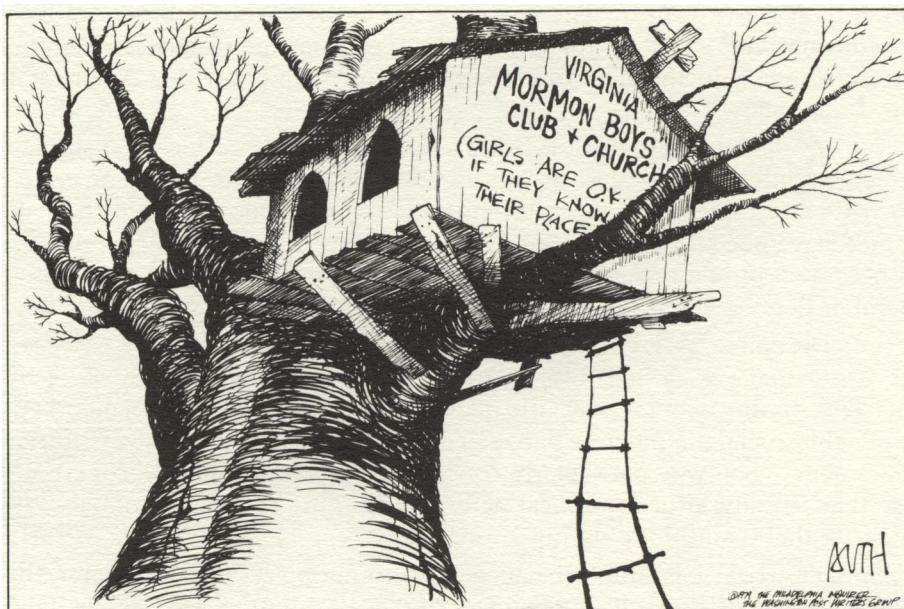
In a December 1979 *Washington Post* op-ed piece, Sonia herself expressed the belief that the Church was in the midst of a "serious moral crisis. Its decisive crossing over into the anti-ERA politics has eroded in most members' minds the crucial distinctions between church and state that our Constitution guarantees." She was particularly concerned that the Church's "covert and less than strictly ethical political activities [might] be a compromise with integrity that it simply could not afford."

Sonia's article was counterbalanced by another piece a few days later, this one by Eleanor Ricks Colton, president of the Washington, D.C. Stake Relief Society. Colton in reiterating the Church's position for the *Washington Post*, stressed that Sonia had been "excommunicated for apostasy, not for her position on ERA. Sonia chose to attack the Church and its leaders and urged non-members to reject its missionaries." As a consequence "she could not expect to remain a member in good standing."

"Although the official Mormon stance is that its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment is a moral one, not one that involves political issues," Diane Divoky of the *Sacramento Bee* wrote in May 1980, "Mormons have been central in the anti-ERA movement that has brought ratification of the amendment to a halt." Sonia Johnson's sin was not her pro-ERA rhetoric, Divoky argued, but her descriptions of the role of her church in calling Mormon women "out of their homes to lobby against ERA with funds which were raised with the blessings of church authorities in Salt Lake City."

A sizeable portion of those funds, Linda Cicero and Marcia Fram of the *Miami Herald* found in April 1980, were part of "a massive last-minute campaign that funneled thousands of dollars into the Florida election . . . for candidates who would vote against the Equal Rights Amendment." Cicero and Fram quoted unnamed sources within the Church as saying that their leaders had "set a goal of \$10,000 for each candidate and estimated that \$60,000, if not more, was contributed within a 17-day period before the November 7, 1978 election."

The most critical "questions posed by what took place in Florida," in Cicero's mind, centered on "whether the Mormons who contributed money were exercising a political right or responding to religious appeal and whether they perceived the requests as coming from individuals—or as coming from the spiritual leaders of the Church. In a follow-up piece, the *Sacramento Bee's*



Divoky explained how a sizeable portion of those funds had been raised through contributions from Sacramento and Bay Area Mormons.

Even now, after Sonia has passed somewhat from the spotlight, the Mormon-ERA connection continues. “Today, as its opponents crow and its proponents despair, the Equal Rights Amendment is nearly dead,” but Judy Foreman of the *Boston Globe* contended in late June 1981, there was “one man—one epiphany—that could deliver” the final three States needed for the ERA to become part of the Constitution. “The man is white. He is 86 years old.” That “man is Spencer W. Kimball, president of the 150-year-old Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as the Mormons.”

Just how powerful is the Church? “If all groups that oppose the ERA marched off into the ocean and drowned,” Sonia told Foreman, “the Mormons would still kill it by themselves. They are not just a little group of termites: they are head and shoulders above any other group. They are the most powerful and the most wealthy.” Their strength is undeniable, according to Foreman. “Already this has meant a mostly secret, tightly organized, well financed, church oriented drive in key States to kill the ERA.” The Mormons, she felt, will be the “key” obstacles the pro-ERA forces will have to contend with in their last frantic efforts.

#### *THE JOSEPH SMITH III BLESSING*

It was against this background that the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times* and *Washington Star* and several other major newspapers on March 18, carried front page stories of yet another, “hot potato” for the Church. A collector of Mormon memorabilia, Mark Hoffman, of Sandy, Utah, had discovered a 137-

year-old document which threatened to renew the succession controversy between the LDS and RLDS. Michael Moritz of the Times-Life News Service saw it as offering "evidence that Joseph Smith once considered his son Joseph Smith III, rather than Brigham Young, to be his true successor." Moritz suggested that "church historians liken the debate to ones that might have occurred had the Israelites questioned the succession to Moses or Christians doubted the leadership of the Church after the Crucifixion."

During his lifetime Joseph Smith had considered several modes of succession, including lineal designation. Ultimately, a majority of the members became convinced that the leadership of the Church should pass to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. This group under the leadership of Brigham Young headed westward toward Utah three years later. A sizeable number of the dissenters still believed that Joseph had wanted his son, Joseph Smith III, to be his heir. This group remained behind and eventually settled in Independence, finally persuading Joseph Smith III to become their leader in 1860.

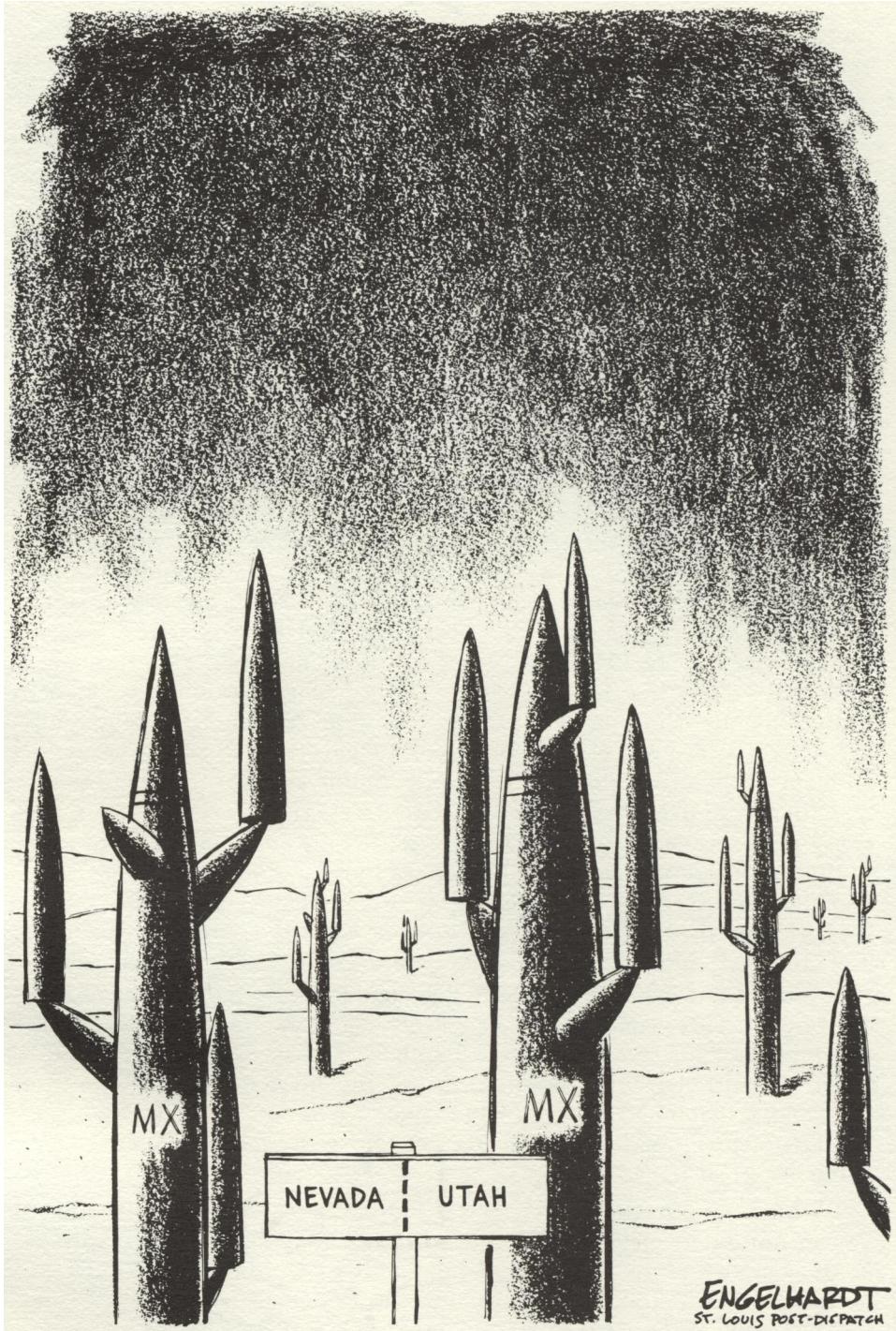
The newly discovered document containing the transcript of a blessing given by Joseph Smith to his eldest son, eleven-year-old Joseph Smith III, declared in part that Young Joseph "shall be my successor to the Presidency of the High Priesthood: a Seer, and a Revelator, and a Prophet, unto the Church; which appointment belongeth to him by blessing, and also by right."

Kenneth L. Woodward of *Newsweek* did not feel the "dramatic discovery" would bring the "two churches together—it is more than a century late to accomplish that—but the paper lends strong historical support to the Reorganized Saints, who choose as prophets lineal descendents of Joseph Smith, Jr." As Woodward was quick to point out, however, the RLDS "have another problem: their current prophet, Wallace B. Smith, has no brothers or sons."

Both *Time* and the *Washington Star* quoted BYU historian D. Michael Quinn as saying that the terms of the blessing "mean only one thing in the Mormon Church, that Joseph Smith III would be the President of the Church." Quinn also told *Newsweek* that it verified "a much-disputed issue in history." Fred Esplin in his April, 1981, *Utah Holiday* article also cited Quinn as "one of the best informed" among those historians who claim to understand the blessing.

Quinn in this instance expressed the feeling that the document "supports what historical research has indicated for several years—that Joseph Smith did indeed tell his son in a blessing that he would succeed him as president of the Church. In Quinn's opinion, it was the "ultimate refutation of those who denied that it had occurred," but what "we have is a wonderful, beautiful blessing of a prophet-father to his son, which the son ultimately rejected. There is a great tragedy in that."

Within a month, the discovery was old news. "Although the document was an important historical find," *Christianity Today* stressed on April 24, "neither branch of the church is making a big deal out of it. The RLDS has 'no interest in pursuing old nineteenth-century battles,' said Richard Howard, historian of the Reorganized Church in Independence. 'The Mormon Church has settled the issue of descent to their satisfaction, and we have settled it to ours.'"



**Making The Desert Bloom**

Besides, the “two branches” were, according to *Christianity Today*, already “far apart theologically. The Missouri church is far closer to orthodox Christianity in its views of Scripture and the Trinity than the decidedly unchristian brethren in Utah.”

John M. Crewdson, in a special report to the *New York Times* provided a useful insight into the “unaccustomed standing” conferred upon the Reorganized Church as a result of the manuscript’s discovery. The document “generated what one church member described as ‘controlled elation’ in Independence. “If the document is authentic—and so far neither side has suggested that it is not,” Crewdson reasoned, “it now seems that six months before he was shot to death by a mob in Carthage, Ill., Mr. Smith conferred the legacy of leadership upon his son, known as Young Joseph, as his ‘by right.’” It contradicts the long held position of the Utah branch that the Church’s President should be chosen from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, while affirming the stance of the Missouri branch.

Crewdson continued by explaining that a statement released by the Utah branch describing the “manuscript as referring only to ‘the possibility’ of Young Joseph’s succeeding his father.” Although it was conceded that “he had been blessed and ‘designated’ by his father, he had not been ordained as his successor and that it was not ‘necessarily a birthright to be president of the church,’ an office that ‘comes by virtue of fitness and qualification.’”

On March 19, 1981, an exchange agreement was signed by LDS and RLDS officials, and the document was turned over to the RLDS in exchange for one of the few existing copies of an 1833 Mormon scripture, the Book of Commandments, conservatively valued at \$10,000. The exchange was to be conditional for ninety days, pending further authentication by the RLDS. Spokesmen of both churches agreed that the discovery of the blessing had done little to improve chances of reconciliation.

#### FIRST PRESIDENCY STATEMENT ON MX

Few issues have proven more provocative in the eyes of the media than the First Presidency May 5, 1981, statement opposing the basing of the MX missile system in Utah and Nevada. Almost immediately after this front page story was carried by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and virtually every other prominent paper, syndicated columnist Carl T. Rowan charged the Church with “practicing a morality of convenience.” The Mormons’ “geographic morality” should not, he felt, affect decisions regarding MX, even if it bruises Joseph Smith’s dream of a Mormon Shangri-La. He would have felt much better if President “Kimball had said that the Lord had told him” to tell Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger “that he and his Soviet counterpart were commanded to go back to the table and find ways to halt an arms race that endangers everyone.”

Implicit in the logic of the Mormon position, columnist William F. Buckley, Jr., suggested, was the belief “that any installation that harbors instruments of potential destruction somehow mystically contaminates that site. Well the earth is morally neutral, and doesn’t know whether what is being built on it

is a missile launching site or a hospital." The Church's "solipsistic concern," was a "thoughtless intrusion into the logic of defense" which "weakens the defense of Western Europe."

"The Mormon Church's opposition to the MX missile," the *New York Times* suggested, was "an oddly selective summons to national morality in the service of an obviously parochial interest." Although it represented a "significant political blow against a questionable weapons project," it was "also disturbingly sanctimonious. The Church has found its way to a sound conclusion for mostly wrong reasons."

Using even stronger language, the *Nation* found the edict laudable but troublesome because "it seemed to imply that the MX, or any other system, was all right somewhere else." Where then should we put it? "On this, the most urgent question of our time, the Mormon elders offered equivocal guidance." An equally critical editorial appeared in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

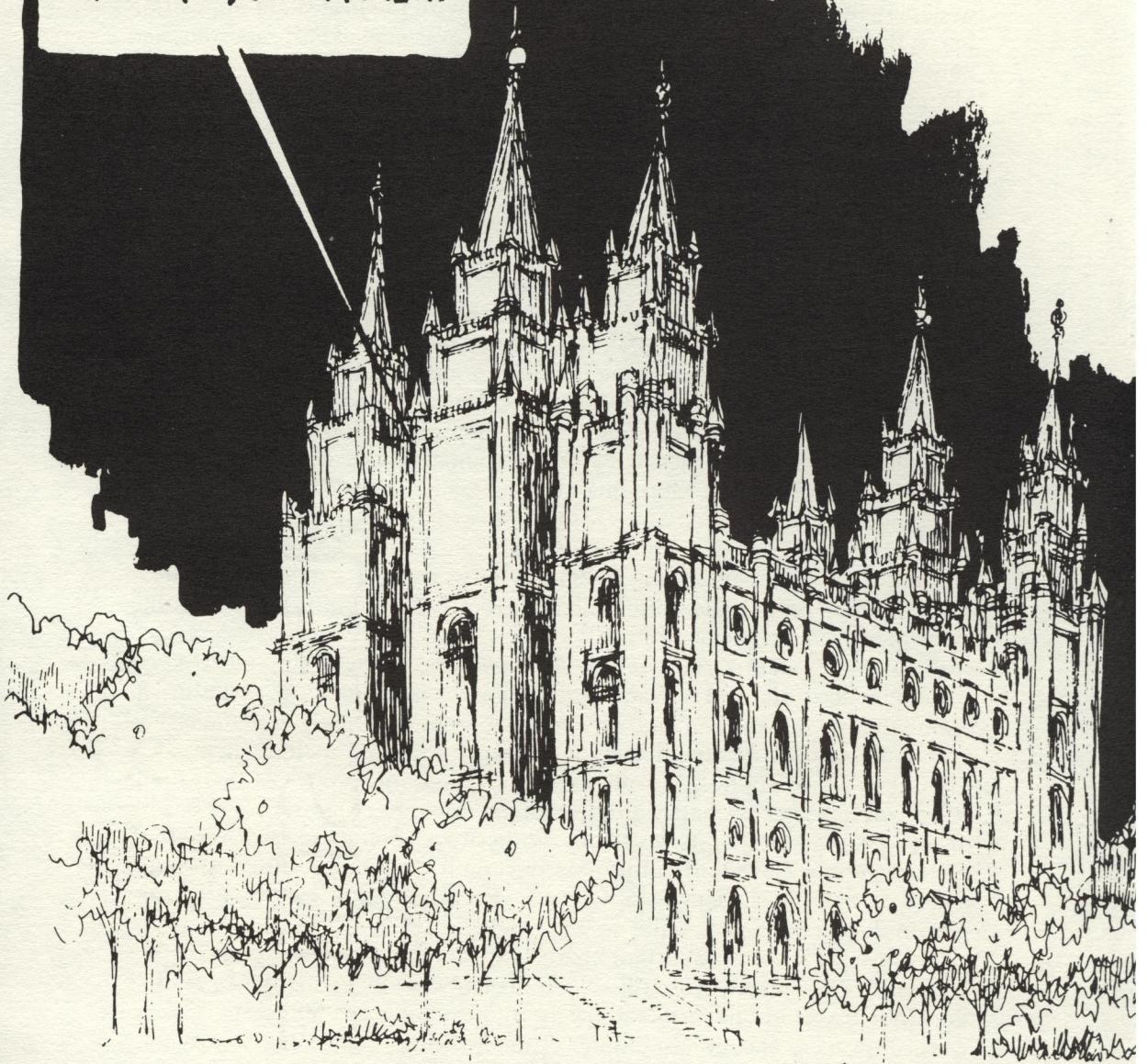
Conversely, Colman McCarthy of the *Washington Post* saw the Mormon's position as "unexpectedly progressive." In the actual wording of the statement, he reasoned, "which seems not to have been read by some of the Eastern critics in their rush to uncover hypocrisy, the Mormons say they are against basing the MX on land anywhere." This position was "less a sudden conversion than a return to its heritage. In 1860, when it was a civil war, not a global war that loomed," Brigham Young himself on at least two occasions denounced the manufacturing of the weapons of war.

Although the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* considered it "unfortunate" that the Church had "not taken a firm position against deployment of the [MX] system anywhere," it also conceded that the statement was in harmony with several earlier pronouncements against nuclear weapons. Government studies, the *Baltimore Sun* concluded, confirmed that the Church's concerns were well-founded. They welcomed "the Mormon Church's call 'to marshal the genius of the nation' in a search for alternatives less disruptive than the Carter shell game."

The *Post-Dispatch*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, and the *Washington Post* all saw the Church's opposition as a formidable political obstacle and a major setback for the Air Force's new strategic missile. Columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak thought the Church's statement might well be the "death knell" of Carter's deployment proposal." Mormon opposition, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* reasoned, "should prompt rethinking of the MX plan. Alternatives, such as more missile-equipped submarines, should be newly explored as an interim solution. Interim, that is, to an eventual end to the arms race. The Mormons—and a lot of other people—are for that."

In Salt Lake City, the *Tribune* credited the Church with emphasizing "many adverse physical, sociological and human survival factors in the Utah-Nevada basing choice." Even more important was the "fervent plea for forward movement on stalled strategic arms limitation negotiations with the Soviet Union. . . . The implication is clear enough: humanity's best, perhaps only chance to escape the terror of nuclear war lies in stopping the arms race and intensifying efforts to reduce existing weapons stockpiles."

THE MORMON TABERNACLE  
CHOIR WILL NOW SING,  
'FARTHER, MX FROM ME!..



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Other prominent publications, such as *Time* magazine, merely chose to report the story or relied on political cartoons, as did the *Denver Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and *San Diego Union*. The Mormon position on MX has probably been as important a source of editorial comment as any issue surrounding the Church in recent memory.

Six weeks after the First Presidency issued its statement, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, echoing sentiments akin to those of William Buckley, compared the Mormon challenge in the United States against plans to deploy the MX missile in Utah and Nevada with the Protestant opposition to NATO missiles in his country. Schmidt, the *Washington Post* reported, had gone so far as to warn the Reagan administration that a decision to put the MX missiles someplace else would damage West Germany's ability to keep its NATO missile commitment.

### BROAD OVERVIEWS

Despite the overriding prominence of the foregoing stories, there have been in recent years several other extensive examinations of Mormonism. Many of these were prompted by the Church's sesquicentennial. An increasingly subtle and sophisticated analysis is apparent in these articles. Mormons today, "unlike their forefathers of three generations ago," Rodman W. Paul believes, have precisely those attributes "one would expect of an affluent, confident middle class blessed with homes of visible comfort."

Social and economic experimentation among the Mormons, Paul's June 1977 *American Heritage* article stresses, are characteristics of another era. This transformation has seen Mormons join the general American trend as they have moved from rural America to dwell in suburbs and cities, and "away from farming and the simple crafts to the professions—commerce, finance, and industry." They now direct major business and real estate operations in most of the nation's major cities and are prominent and influential as politicians at every level of government.

Still, there remains a remarkable cohesiveness among Mormons. Much of what they do is directed "toward strengthening the church by conserving its membership, rather than outward toward meeting widely felt social and economic needs." Although they are "deeply involved in the Chamber of Commerce, local politics, business and the professions, much of their life is still spent in self-contained Mormon groups." Whether Mormons will be able to adjust to "contemporary pressures, without sacrificing the essence of their distinctive and close-knit culture" is uncertain. "In view of the Mormons' record of meeting challenges in the past," Paul thought it was "by no means certain that they [would] fail."

Even with several important changes in doctrine over the years, *Time's* August 7, 1978, profile was still able to present convincing evidence on why the Church would "never blend easily into the religious landscape." There were, however, encouraging signs. The Church's "most offensive tenet," had vanished with President Spencer W. Kimball's revelation allowing "all worthy males" to hold the priesthood for the first time. This revelation also

“solved the dilemma of who would be eligible to use the new temple in racially mixed Brazil.” As a result of President Kimball’s “innovations, new classes and cultures [might] yet penetrate Brigham Young’s mountain-ringed fastness.”

“While the Mormons are definitely not moving toward the American religious mainstream,” Jan Shipps claimed that America might well be moving toward them. “Because Mormonism is dynamic and changing,” she told *Christian Century* readers, “it will never be possible to say with certainty that ‘in Zion all is well.’ Yet things seem to be going along with remarkable equanimity right now.”

Viewing this “quintessential religion” from an equally positive perspective, syndicated columnist George Will in January 1979, lauded the Mormons for making “up the most singular great church to come into existence in the United States.” He extolled them for “triumphing in this world,” while at the same time “turning faith into works.” These “American Zionists,” as Will characterized them, “were and, to an astonishing extent in this homogenizing nation, still as distinctive as the first Americans, the Puritans.”

One of the more insightful articles prompted by the 150th anniversary of the Church in 1980, was written by Kenneth A. Briggs for the *New York Times*. Briggs viewed the Church as a “burgeoning and influential religion whose members eagerly espouse the traditional values of patriotism and capatilism; a highly respected embodiment of a clean-living, old-fashioned set of principles.”

At the very edge of Mormonism’s “optimism and prosperity,” however, Briggs saw several potential problems; the most obvious of these being the Church’s stand against the equal rights amendment with its accompanying conviction that key roles for women are only in the home. Its “stepped-up efforts to preserve the traditional morals life” were growing increasingly formidable. “For example, one-third of the church [was] now made up of single people over age 25, who do not fit into the ideal image that the church holds up.” This problem was “especially acute among divorced women.” Far more subtle are the pressures produced by the entrepreneurial spirit of Mormons, which critics both inside and outside the Church contended, has “indirectly encouraged greed and unbridled ambition decried by Mormon teachings.”

Also in April of 1980, John Dart of the *Los Angeles Times* portrayed current Mormons as “‘more American than the average Americans.’” For Dart they perpetuate “in their own circles the culturally homogeneous picture America had of itself in the 1940s and 1950s.” The Mormon desire for acceptance by fellow Americans, he argued, was “motivated more by the desire to gain access to prospective converts than any desire to meld into American society.” Still, confirmed Mormon watchers saw a spirit of independence asserting itself “despite the outward appearance of constant tradition and resistance to change.”

*U.S. News & World Report* paid tribute to the Mormons twice during the Church’s sesquicentennial year, crediting them with “grappling” quite well with their “growing pains.” In August, James Mann praised them, as their

critics had, for the tremendous reception which their message of optimism had received.

Chris Jones and Gary Benson used the May/June *Saturday Evening Post* to applaud the Church for becoming widely recognized "as one of the fastest-growing and energetic religious groups in the world." Why, the two authors asked, "do the Mormons have a significantly lower cancer rate and fewer heart attacks and debilitating diseases than other Americans? Could it be that family stability, physical fitness, abstinence, hard work and self-reliance are not outmoded virtues after all?"

Describing Mormons with far less respect, Kenneth C. Danforth in the May 1980 *Harper's* told of a recent experience in Salt Lake City where everything was more "firmly in the moral, economic, and political grip of a prudish cult" than any other city in the Western World. Danforth was certainly not the first to recognize the economic prowess of the Church.

The Church's "highly secretive, largely tax-exempt financial empire," has long been a source of immense fascination to the media. Much of what the Church has done with its various businesses was appraised by *Advertising Age* in December 1977 as being subtle but effective. In Salt Lake City it had adopted a "'hands off' attitude in the operation and function of the city." Instead it worked through its own businesses and was influential in persuading other major companies "to join in revitalizing the downtown area and its overall input into the Salt Lake City economy."

Looking at the Mormon financial empire far more critically, an article prepared for *New West* by Jeffrey Kaye credited the Church with wielding "more economic power more effectively than the state of Israel or the Pope in Rome." At least 50% of what was produced by the Church's welfare program, Kaye alleged, was being sold on the open market, while the Church at the same time continued to request exemptions from property taxes in California under the guise that the land was being used for charitable purposes.

After surveying the most populated areas of the state, *New West* found that the Church was paying property taxes on less than a third of its holdings. Exemptions on the remaining two-thirds meant that "\$15 million in property taxes that might otherwise be collected never [saw] the state coffers." For some "it might seem strange, almost slightly blasphemous, to refer to a church as a corporation, but the analogy here is inescapable." There was no question in Kaye's mind. The Church was "undeniably corporate." It owned property "in all fifty states and on every continent abroad." The confusion inside the church about the size of the Mormon empire "reflected the way the leadership exercises control."

As the Mormon kingdom had grown, so also had the wealth which various analysts, journalists, and historians have estimated to be between \$3 million and \$5 million a day. Calculations by Robert Unger of the *Kansas City Times* revealed that the Church was taking "in \$708,750,000 a year—or at least \$2 million a day in tithing alone."

Bob Gottlieb and Peter Wiley placed the Church's vast economic holdings "on a par with many of the country's largest corporations." Included among

the Church's businesses which they itemized for the August 1980 *Nation* were "four insurance companies; a major agribusiness corporation; a huge media conglomerate with a book publishing company, book stores, a media consulting company and fourteen commercial TV and radio stations" stretching from New York to San Francisco. Other assets included woollen mills and other manufacturing outlets; a computer company; a major real estate operation; and hundreds of thousands of acres of valuable urban real estate and prime farm land.

With the Church's growth as a financial power the media has also begun to devote considerable attention to the Church's increased involvement in the American political process. In November 1978, both the *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post* felt prompted to identify religion as the dominant issue in Idaho's gubernatorial election. "Possibly not since John F. Kennedy's Roman Catholicism was raised when he ran for president in 1960," reasoned William Endicott, whose story first appeared in the *Times* and then the *Post*, "has religion played such a major role in an American political campaign." It was a campaign in which a "grim-faced Ronald Reagan" peered "from the television screen in a 30-second commercial for Republican gubernatorial candidate Allen R. Larsen" to caution "Idaho voters not to be swayed by the religious issue."

There were charges that the Church was involved in a conspiracy to take over the state government. And then there were the miners in the north who feared the Mormons "would take away their booze, their gambling" and their women. The irony of the story was that whatever the outcome, Idaho was about to elect its first Mormon governor. But John V. Evans, a former lieutenant governor who moved to the top job when Cecil D. Andrus became Secretary of Interior, was not an active Mormon and so proved to be only a momentary concern after his election.

Focusing on the Mormon influence in California politics, Kerry Drager provided a brief look at the five Mormons serving in the state legislature and then devoted a similar amount of attention to lawmakers in Washington. Drager's informative July 1980 *California Journal* article could well serve as a handout on why Mormons have become "involved in political activities, whether it's running for office, contributing to a candidate, speaking out at a hearing, or merely voting and keeping informed on the issues."

In the midst of the Church's sesquicentennial, "prosperity, increasingly ungovernable membership growth, and a swirl of vital, secular influences," Joel Kotlin's April 1980 *Washington Post* story showed how attention had increasingly begun to focus on Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. As "heir-apparent to the mantle of president Spencer W. Kimball, the frail 85-year-old titular head of the church, recognized prophet, seer and revelator," Benson was becoming an ever increasing source of concern to the more liberal among the faithful.

"The Mormon political outlook today," *Nation* readers were told by Bob Gottlieb and Peter Wiley in August 1980, "is conservative, probusiness, pro-development and on social issues vigorously opposed to women's liberation

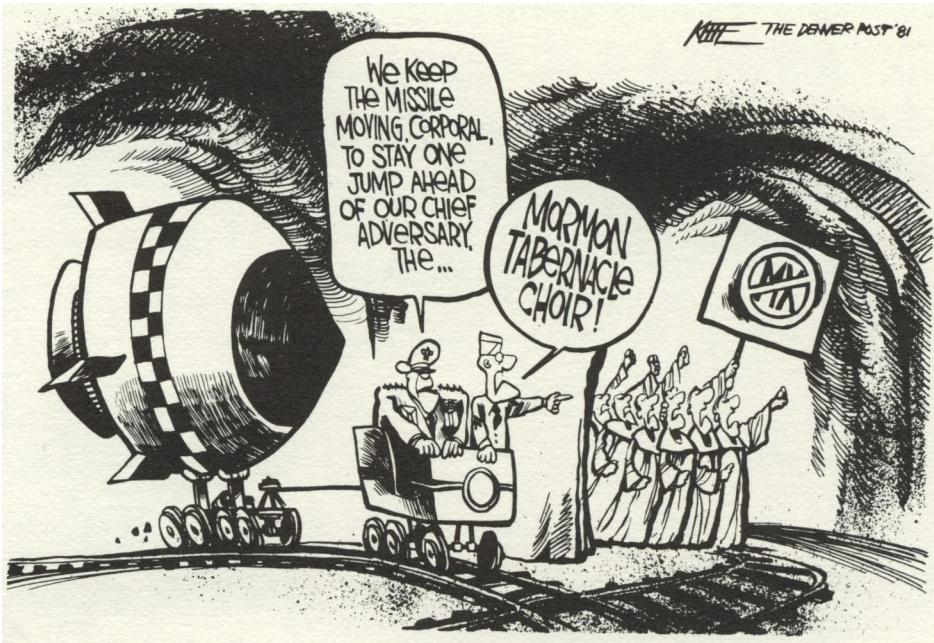
and related movements." The future, however, was less clear. "Beneath this apparent consensus a fundamental debate is taking place which pits the next generation of modern corporate managers against a more virulent right-wing grouping under the leadership of Ezra Taft Benson."

Benson's words, the two authors contended, frightened many liberal Mormons. "With fear and trepidation, the Mormons face the future poised to do battle in a land where they see 'evil and crime and carnality covering the earth,' where 'inequity abounds' and where 'there is no peace on earth.'" Expressing similar concern, the *Economist* thought there are many Mormons whose "consciences would be stretched to the limit by the types of judgments Mr. Benson might make."

"The Mormon Church is enormously conservative, enormously," Howard Means observed in the March 1981 *Washingtonian*, "and well located in the new Republican era. The Mormon contingent in Congress has now grown from ten to eleven with the election of Senator Paula Hawkins in Florida." Even with "Arizona Representative Mo Udall among its numbers, the contingent has the most conservative voting record of any religious group in Congress."

Mormons, as Means points out, are well placed in Washington. Senator Jake Garn now directs the Senate Banking Committee and Orrin Hatch serves as chairman of the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee. Richard Richards, the newly crowned head of the Republican National Committee, is a Mormon, as is Terrel Bell, the Secretary of Education. Other Mormons well placed in the Republican Party include David M. Kennedy, once Richard Nixon's Secretary of the Treasury; former Michigan governor and presidential hopeful George Romney; and Brent Scowcroft, a national security adviser to both the Ford and Nixon administrations.

Means sees "nothing inherently wrong, or unusual" about the Church gaining such political clout, but feels "it is in the person of Ezra Taft Benson—senior apostle of the Mormon Church—that the two forces of political and economic power may well come together to form a test of faith for many Mormons." Mormons believe "that there will come a day when the Constitution of the United States will hang as if by a thread and that it will be the burden and glory of the Mormon people—the custodians of Christ's True Church, founded in the Divine Land to rescue it." Ezra Taft Benson already believes that time has come, and Means quotes him as saying: "Be wary of those so-called political scientists who advocate that the Church restrict itself to moral issues and would bar the living prophets from dealing with political and social issues." Means concedes that "it is open to question how far Benson would go—or could go—in politicizing the Church should he become its prophet," but he has "already given some indication of how far he might go in putting the Church's vast resources and its three million American members at the service of the radical right. At least twice he has publicly said that he can foresee the day when Mormons will be directed on how to vote in presidential elections."



Also well chronicled is Benson's support of the Freeman Institute, which John Harrington claimed in an August 1980 issue of *The Nation*, "has become a political force capable of influencing the outcome of elections and legislation on the local, state and national levels."

The current media image of the Mormons might well be summarized in the *New York Times* article, "The Mormon Nation," by Peter Bart, who writes,

While the ubiquitous "moral activists" are hard at work selling their vision of tomorrow's America, anyone interested in peeking into the new American Dream need look no further than that part of the United States that Westerners call "the Mormon Nation."

The three million Mormons of Utah and neighboring states have quietly constructed a living laboratory for this new society—the "moral" America of the future. No outsider can travel around the region without noticing that strangers smile at one another, almost everyone has a job, crime is rare, schools are serene, and neighbors pitch in to help those less fortunate. The front-porch friendliness reminds you of an earlier, Norman Rockwell America. . . .

Having painted this benign picture, he goes on: "Moral activists who believe that spiritual leaders would play a bolder role in society would approve of the way things are done in the Mormon Nation. When the Church speaks, people obey."

Then the reverse image appears. Bart asks, "Is this indeed a better society?" and begins to describe the "serious flaws . . . appearing in the fabric of Mormon life"—psychological problems, especially among women and

youth, excessive personal financial stresses, lack of support for the arts, increasing repressive measures applied to dissenters and researchers—in short, an unduly homogenized society: If the Mormon Nation embodies the blueprint for a moral America, many people accustomed to living in a more vibrant, heterogeneous society would surely find it a uniquely uncomfortable place to live.”

Bart, newspaperman and novelist, has dramatized his version of the Mormon nation in a novel, *Thy Kingdom Come*, described on its dust jacket as a story that “drives home . . . the frightening consequences of the concentration of power in religious leadership and the very real possibilities of its misuse.” This blurb aptly describes the interests of the media as they continue to probe the Mormon story.

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# EXCOMMUNICATION AND CHURCH COURTS: A NOTE FROM THE GENERAL HANDBOOK OF INSTRUCTIONS

LESTER E. BUSH, JR.

*The heads of the Ecclesiastical Council hereby make known, that, already well assured of the evil opinions and doings of Baruch de Espinoza, they have endeavored in sundry ways and by various promises to turn him from his evil courses. But as they have been unable to bring him to any better way of thinking; on the contrary, as they are every day better certified of the horrible heresies entertained and avowed by him, and of the insolence with which these heresies are promulgated and spread abroad, and many persons worthy of credit having borne witness to these in the presence of the said Espinoza, he has been held fully convicted of the same. Review having therefore been made of the whole matter before the chiefs of the Ecclesiastical Council, it has been resolved, the Councillors assenting thereto, to anathematize the said Spinoza, and to cut him off from the people of Israel, and from the present hour to place him in Anathema with the following malediction:*

*With the judgment of the angels and the sentence of the saints, we anathematize, execrate, curse and cast out Baruch deEspinoza, the whole of the sacred community assenting, in presence of the sacred books with the six-hundred-and-thirteen precepts written therein, pronouncing against him the malediction wherewith Elisha cursed the children, and all the maledictions written in the Book of the Law. Let him be accused by day, and accursed by night; let him be accursed in his lying down, and accursed in his rising up; accursed in going out and accursed in coming in. May the Lord never more pardon or acknowledge him; may the wrath and displeasure of the Lord burn henceforth against this man, load him with all the curses written in the Book of the Law, and blot out his name from under the sky; may the Lord sever him from evil from all the tribes of Israel, weight him with all the maledictions of the firmament contained in the Book of Law; and may all ye who are obedient to the Lord your God be saved this day.*

*Hereby then are all admonished that none hold converse with him by word of mouth, none hold communication with him by writing; that no one do him any service, no one abide under the same roof with him, no one approach within four cubits length of him, and no one read any document dictated by him, or written by his hand.*

*During the reading of the curse, the wailing and protracted note of a great horn was heard to fall in from time to time; the lights, seen brightly burning at the beginning of the ceremony, were extinguished one by one as it proceeded, till at the end the last went out—typical of the extinction of the spiritual life of the excommunicated man—and the congregation was left in total darkness.*

The excommunication of Spinoza, 1656<sup>1</sup>

## I

1. Have your actions influenced members and non-members to oppose church programs, i.e., the missionary program?
2. Have your actions and statements advocated diminished support of church authority?
3. Have you presented false doctrine which would damage others spiritually?

Letter of excommunication to Sonia Johnson, 1979

AMONG THE THINGS MORMON brought into the spotlight by the Sonia Johnson affair, perhaps the least well understood was the LDS notion of “excommunication.” To non-Mormons the process seemed, in Phil Donahue’s widely heard characterization, a “medieval” anachronism. On the Mormon side, while the notion was hardly a surprise, a remarkable ignorance of the criteria and mechanics was generally evident whenever the faithful tried to “explain” what was going on. Even among knowledgeable Mormons, there was little agreement as to whether the “trial” followed the “established Church procedures”—or, for that matter, on what these procedures actually were. Many Mormons “knew” all the answers were to be found in the *General Handbook of Instructions*, a policy guide issued to all local church leaders by the First Presidency, but very few seemed to have a working knowledge of its contents. One critic, in fact, has charged that the trial of Sonia Johnson was a miscarriage for the very reason that she and her supporters were ignorant of the rules under which they were operating—they had no access to the *General Handbook*. In this note I will review the relevant guidance provided by the Church in this handbook, for it indeed has become the authoritative guide on church judicial procedures.

Guidance on “transgressions” did not, of course, originate with the relatively recent *General Handbooks of Instructions*. There was direction on the subject from the very earliest days of the Restoration. A revelation dated

February 9, 1831, presently published as D&C 42, probably represents the earliest criteria document. A standard to the present day, it was included in the 1833 Book of Commandments, as well as the 1835 and all succeeding editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. This revelation specified:

Thou shalt not kill; and he that kills shall not have forgiveness in this world, nor in the world to come. . . .

Thou shalt not steal; and he that stealeth and will not repent shall be cast out.

Thou shalt not lie; he that lieth and will not repent shall be cast out.

Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.

And he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith, and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out.

Thou shall not commit adultery; and he that comitteth adultery, and repenteth not, shall be cast out.

But he that has committed adultery and repents with all his heart, and forsaketh it, and doeth it no more, thou shalt forgive;

But if he doeth it again, he shall not be forgiven, but shall be cast out.

Thou shalt not speak evil of thy neighbor, nor do him any harm.

Thou knowest my laws concerning these things are given in my scriptures; he that sinneth and repenteth not shall be cast out.

A clarification later in the revelation further indicated that penitent persons who had “put away their companions, for the cause of fornication” should not be cast out, but that “if ye shall find that any persons, have left their companions, for the sake of adultery, and they themselves are the offenders, and their companions are living, they shall be cast out from among you. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Guidance supplementary to that found in the Doctrine and Covenants appears to have been conveyed in many ways—in authoritative epistles, by the words of church leaders in general addresses, or through personal correspondence or local visits. While the general handbooks eventually eliminated the need for these latter mechanisms, they still have been used from time to time in recent years. Current handbooks, in fact, specifically provide for contact with the First Presidency for additional guidance on highly unusual cases.

Although a review of nineteenth-century grounds for church courts is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to recall that disfellowship or excommunication was never limited solely to those guilty of murder, theft, lying or adultery. While these were perhaps the most commonly cited causes for such church action, there were other obvious early indications—such as “apostasy,” “murmuring” and “dissension.” With the establishment by a subsequent revelation of the bishop as a “common judge,” and the installation of the high council as an official court of appeal, the practical jurisdiction of Mormon courts soon extended to many mundane, secular considerations, such as personal grievances among the members. Under such circumstances

the “restitution” decreed by these courts was often entirely secular, but occasionally more traditional ecclesiastical sanctions were meted out for secular failings as well. The First Presidency, for example, once issued a detailed “general Epistle” of guidance to emigrants about to embark for Zion, and backed it up with the warning that “any material departure from the spirit of these instructions will be considered cause for disfellowship from the Church, or suspension from office.”<sup>3</sup> Church secular authority came to a virtual end late in the nineteenth century, and the jurisdiction of its courts was explicitly limited to more purely ecclesiastical matters. Bishops today are instructed *not* to involve the church court system in the resolution of difficulties between members; under such circumstances the bishops are to function solely as advisers to the parties involved.

The *General Handbook of Instructions* evolved out of small circulars on tithing issued periodically by the First Presidency late in the nineteenth century. From 1886 on, these were apparently sent each December as “Annual Instructions.”<sup>4</sup> Although not so designated at the time, the 1899 edition in this series, a fourteen-page pamphlet entitled *Instructions to Presidents of Stakes, Bishops of Wards and Stake Tithing Clerks*, marked the first in the numbered sequence of handbooks which now has progressed to “Number 21.” The next ten “Annual Instructions” after 1899 (“No. 3,” in 1901, was the first to carry a number) dealt almost exclusively with financial matters and, late in the decade, added a little about membership statistics. It was not until 1913, when the *Circular of Instructions No. 12 To Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, Bishops and Counselors, Stake, Mission and Ward Clerks and all Church Authorities* was issued, that anything approximating a “general handbook” was made available to local Mormon leaders. While this fifty-two-page pamphlet bore little resemblance to the present 123-page 8½” × 11” book, it treated a wide range of topics “in order that there may be uniformity in the methods of conducting the business of the Church and its stakes, wards and missions. . . .” Among its contents was the first section on “Transgressors.”

Before beginning a detailed review of these and succeeding criteria for church courts, several general observations should be made. First, surprisingly little has been said in the handbooks over the years about the purpose of church courts. The implication of the injunction of D&C 42 that certain transgressors should be “cast out” seems to be that a purging or purification of the Church is intended. A punitive function was equally implicit in the denial to disciplined members of certain “privileges”—on a sliding scale, depending on the seriousness of the transgression. While virtually all the handbooks which deal with church courts speak of the “rights and privileges” thus lost, the purifying function was implicit rather than explicit until the most recent *General Handbook*, which speaks of a requirement to “purge iniquity from the Church.” Related to this, but in fact a different function, is the notion first added in 1960 that (in criminal cases) “the dignity of the Church will be conserved by prompt action.” Within the past few years another function has been cited, without obvious precedent in any previous

handbook. This is the notion that church court action *facilitated* the process of repentance by excommunicating or disfellowshipping transgressors. Where historically—at least within the context of the handbooks—such penalties from the transgressor’s standpoint were entirely punitive, current guidance suggests that debarment also serves an atoning function, which “allows” or “help[s] individuals [to] repent” more fully than presumably they otherwise could.

A second general point is that, as will be seen, the list of indicted transgressions has grown substantially over the last seventy years. While some accommodation to new social realities is evident in this growth, it is clear that most of the elaboration is one of refinement rather than true expansion. These refinements are almost exclusively in behavioral transgressions or *actions* which are unacceptable. Unacceptable beliefs, by contrast, have never been subjected to clarification beyond repeated attacks on the “fundamentalist” heresy.

Third, throughout the history of these guidelines local leaders have been granted an over-riding discretionary authority over when church courts are convened, and what penalties are assessed. Despite an alleged policy to the contrary under John Taylor, bishops throughout the twentieth century have been authorized to waive church court action against most, if not all, penitent transgressors. Only murder (as suggested in D&C 42), incest (since 1976) and surgery for sex change (since 1980) have ever been exempted from the local discretionary authority of the bishop; these three now mandate excommunication. Other considerations than the transgression, *per se*, have become increasingly important in the decision to take action in recent years. Such long established factors as penitence, and the flagrance or persistence of the transgression have been joined (since 1979) by the ecclesiastical office of the transgressor as *the* major prescribed determinants in nearly all cases. While other, unwritten factors may have further eroded local options in recent years, the handbook nonetheless retains much of the theoretical flexibility it had fifty years ago.

Also of general interest is the enormous increase over the years in the number of excommunications annually, from 55 in 1913 to an average of about 4,500 a year for the six years around 1970.<sup>5</sup> This represents a per capita increase from 1 in 6400 members to 1 in 640. Some of this may reflect only a correction of the “kiddie’ dip” missionary excesses of the early sixties, but it can hardly account for a ten-fold overall increase.<sup>6</sup> Given the relative stability of the handbook criteria over the years, and the continued local autonomy, one is tempted to suggest that Mormons are simply more likely to “transgress” these days. Considering the social context in which the modern Church operates, this may be true. I would suggest, however, that a changed perspective on the part of local leaders—reflecting both firmer informal guidance from above, and the new notion that court sanctions have a redeeming function—is also a significant factor.

The initial 1913 statement of guidance on transgressors contained in *Circular of Instructions No. 12* was notable both for its parsimony and tolerance:

In cases of transgressors, the laws of the Church as set forth in the Doctrine and Covenants [i.e., D&C 42, quoted above] should be complied with. It is not necessary in all cases that those whose offenses are not generally known shall be required to confess in public. Transgressors should be dealt with in kindness and with the object of reclaiming them where possible. The bishop should act with the utmost care and discretion in all such cases.

“Certificates of membership” were not to be issued in the case of transgressors, but “[i]f the offender makes satisfactory amends and shows evidence of true repentance, the certificate may be forwarded with such explanations as may be considered necessary.”

The conciliatory tone was entirely intentional, for Joseph F. Smith, then president of the Church, later followed up this theme in both conference address and First Presidency message. “During President Taylor’s time he hated this great sin [i.e., adultery] so much,” Smith observed, “that he made it a rule that if an elder became an adulterer he was cut off from the Church regardless of his repentance; but each case stands on its own merits. There is no precedence.”<sup>7</sup>

It is clear that the section on transgressions in this handbook was not intended as a comprehensive catalogue, for there had been repeated guidance from the First Presidency by this time that those still entering into polygamous marriages were to be excommunicated, a point nowhere made in the *Circular*.<sup>8</sup> The handbook did instruct, in a section which came indirectly to grips with the question of apostasy, that when a member “expresses a desire not . . . to be considered a member of the Church, and requests that his name be stricken from the records, such person should be summoned to appear before the bishopric, and if he persists in his desire to have his membership canceled, action should be taken accordingly.”

In 1921, now under the Presidency of Heber J. Grant, a new handbook was published as *Instructions to Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks*, No. 13. It contained a greatly enlarged treatment of “transgressions,” much of which was said to be taken from “a forthcoming book on ‘Priesthood,’ to be published by the Church, and now being written by Elder James E. Talmage, of the Council of the Twelve.”<sup>9</sup> While no explicit list of indications for church courts was included, it cited in addition to the general guidance of *Circular of Instructions No. 12*:

—cases in which one party accuses another on allegation of personal grievance

—instances of wrong-doing, such as conduct violative of the law and order of the Church, teaching false doctrine, disobedience to Church

regulations and requirements, encouraging any or all such evils by example or by open or covert advice . . .

Beyond this, members who refused to appear or answer questions at a church court “without justifiable reasons” or who “openly manifest disrespect toward the court or the proceedings” could be “adjudged by the court as in contempt,” and discipline imposed “ranging from reproof or reprimand to disfellowshipment or excommunication.”

Beyond the seeming harshness of this latter instruction—which one suspects was in part brought on by the emerging fundamentalist schism—a compassionate view was still strongly encouraged. In language retained in the following handbook as well, it was stated that cases should be disposed of “according to the publicity already given it.” More specifically, “where persons guilty of adultery and fornication confess their sin, and their transgression is known to themselves only,” there was no need for a trial. A confession to the bishop was sufficient, and “should not be made public or recorded.” If the transgression were more widely known, then confession (without referring to the specific transgression) should be made in the priesthood meeting. If a woman transgressed, this confession was expressed to the priesthood on her behalf by the bishop. The next handbook also added the possibility in some cases for this to take place in Fast meeting. This collective guidance continued through all succeeding handbooks until 1976, when the notion of public confession was dropped.

The fourteenth handbook, issued in 1928 amidst America’s experiment with Prohibition, specified for the first time “transgressions which are ordinarily such as to justify consideration by the bishop’s court:”

- fornication, adultery, and other infractions of the moral law
- liquor drinking
- bootlegging
- criminal acts such as thievery, burglary, or murder
- apostasy and opposition to the Church

Missing altogether was the previous guidance on contempt of court. Perhaps related most closely was a new statement to the effect that the bishopric should consult potential witnesses on “the extent of their knowledge of the facts and their willingness to give the evidence.” If any witnesses object to testifying, “undue pressure should not be brought to bear upon them.”

Additional guidance, apropos that previously given, indicated that “If the transgressor manifest earnest contrition for his fault and shows the real fruits of repentance, he should be forgiven and retain his membership, except as to certain conditions stated in the Revelation [i.e., D&C 42].” Particular concern was expressed that “No records [again, no trial] should be made of minor transgressions of young people who make confession and are forgiven, or of cases of similar character and strictly private nature when so considered by a bishop. . . .” Moreover, “where persons guilty of adultery or fornication

confess their sin . . ." and the case was not one of wide notoriety, there was—as noted above—no need for a trial or public confession. Identical advice, always in cases where the transgression was known only to those involved, was to be found in the next three issued handbooks, extending through the fifties.

Guidance similar to that previously set forth was also included on individuals who desired to have their names removed from church records: if efforts "in kindness and patience" failed to bring them to repentance, they should be excommunicated for "apostasy and at his (or her) own request." Similar guidance continued throughout all future handbooks. Additional comment, beginning in 1944, specified that those who joined other churches need not necessarily be excommunicated, but that joining other churches was "not approved" and could qualify as grounds for such action.

When the next edition of the handbook was published in 1934 as *Handbook of Instructions, No. 15*, "drunkenness" and "cruelty to wives or children" had been added to the list of transgressions "ordinarily" justifying a bishop's court. Attention was "particularly directed to the attitude of the Church with respect to teaching, encouraging, or entering into the practice of so-called plural marriage, statements concerning which have been issued by the First Presidency at various times." The handbook continued, in language based on a previously issued statement by the Presidency:

Any reported violations of the rule adopted by the Church with respect to this practice should be promptly and diligently investigated; and, if persons are found who, as a result of the investigation, appear to have violated this ruling, or who are entering into or teaching or encouraging or conspiring with others to enter into so-called polygamous marriages, action should be taken immediately against such persons, and, if found guilty, they should be excommunicated from the Church. Local Church officers will be held responsible for the proper performance of this duty.

The transgression list in the sixteenth *Handbook of Instructions*, which appeared in 1940 under President George Albert Smith, reflected the end of Prohibition but was otherwise unchanged from its predecessor. "Intemperance" was substituted for "liquor drinking, drunkenness, and bootlegging." That this was to be applied with great restraint was suggested in more detailed guidance given three years earlier: special efforts were to be made to involve "into some activity" the "weak and recalcitrant members who persist in the use of intoxicants;" "The skill of true leadership is shown not in disfellowship or excommunication, but in conversion."<sup>10</sup>

Elsewhere in the handbook, a new section appeared related to the changing social context. Local leaders were advised that members "employed as salesmen in state liquor stores, or in any other way . . . engaged in the trafficking of liquor, should not be assigned stake or ward office. The two positions are incompatible." This ban was continued until 1968 when the twentieth edition of the handbook softened the wording to "cautious consid-

eration should be exercised before persons so involved are called to Church positions." This remains the current guidance.

*Handbook of Instructions, No. 16* also carried expanded instruction on convicted criminals. The two previous handbooks had made brief comments on such cases, emphasizing that "the action of the Bishop's Court is in all cases a matter of last resort, after every possible effort has been made to bring a transgressor to repentance." In lieu of this No. 16 explained that conviction in a criminal court was "prima facie evidence of guilt and the bishop's court is justified in taking action." This, however, "should be deferred" if the individual "evidence a spirit of repentance and desires to retain his membership." A slightly more emphatic guideline followed two handbooks later, with No. 18 in 1960: "Persons convicted of crimes in the civil courts should also receive consideration of the Church courts, subsequent to action of the civil courts. . . . Persistent criminals involved in lesser crimes should be handled in accordance with the gravity of their cases." Any individual so convicted should be asked "to present evidence why he should not be excommunicated." While repentance, per se, was not mentioned in this specific context, the accused's right to be present at his church trial was considered potentially legitimate grounds for a postponement "until he can appear." This policy has continued until very recently.

Finally, the persistence of the Fundamentalist problem was reflected in a considerably expanded discussion in Handbook No. 16 of those still involved in "polygamous or plural marriages," ending with this emphatic injunction:

Each president of stake and bishop will proceed immediately to correct any situation of the kind described and existing within his jurisdiction. There must be no condoning of or trifling with this rebellious condition which must be brought to an end at once. This is imperative.

The same discussion was carried in the next *Handbook of Instructions, No. 17*, which appeared four years later, in 1944, and added "deliberate disobedience to [church] regulations" to the previously indicted "apostasy [and] opposition to the Church." This handbook left the transgression list otherwise unrevised, but did introduce a notable change into the discussion section. To the traditional message on forbearance on private sexual sins was added the observation that "it is difficult to give any set rule for the handling of cases involving moral conduct," each of which must be considered "on its own merits and according to the seriousness of the offense:"

The prevailing opinion in cases involving young unmarried couples who are obliged to marry is to be as lenient as possible, considering always their future lives and the effect which unnecessary publicity may have upon them. Too severe action often defeats the ends of justice. This would be more harmful to the individuals, their families, and the community than any good which it is hoped to accomplish by drastic measures. If transgressions are known only to the persons

involved and they appeal to the bishop of the ward in the spirit of repentance for forgiveness, it is perfectly proper that the case be heard by the bishop of the ward only, who will in wisdom consider the facts and render such decision as his good judgment may dictate. If the bishop feels that they should be forgiven and reinstated to their privileges in the Church, it is his right to take such action and avoid further publicity.

While some of this wording has been deleted, similar or verbatim advice to that just quoted appears in all succeeding handbooks. The next two editions (Nos. 18 and 19) continued to state explicitly that "Bishops have the right to waive Church court action upon proper evidence of genuine repentance," even "where married couples are involved in sexual sin, and only those immediately concerned know of it." Both of these handbooks, however, did note that "where endowed persons are involved [the case took on] added gravity and should be dealt with accordingly." With *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 20* (1968), a subtle but significant shift is first evident. While the foregoing text is largely preserved, the reference to married couples is deleted; No. 21 (1976) deletes altogether the explicit guidance on waiving court action in such cases. The tone and central features of the preceding guidelines, however, remains essentially unchanged to the present day.

As an aside, it is notable that beginning with Handbook 17 (the last in the Goerge Albert Smith administration), and continuing through the first two editions under President McKay, the introductory First Presidency statement expressly *denied* that the contents of the handbook were to be taken as an "official statement of Church doctrine." The latter two of these three also "recognized that there must be flexibility in handling some of these matters and that inspiration and the direction of the Spirit must be sought for and followed." While local leaders have always been encouraged to seek the help of the Spirit, nothing quite like these observations appeared previously or later. The more recent editions, much like the earlier ones, state flatly, "Herein are stated policies and procedures that officers of the Church should know."<sup>11</sup>

It was sixteen years before the next revision of the handbook, the first issued under David O. McKay. This edition, entitled for the first time *General Handbook of Instructions (No. 18)* appeared in 1960. While the language had changed somewhat, the basic list was still very similar to that of the previous three handbooks:

Some sins will require bishops court action and possibly trial by the stake presidency and high council. Others may be handled without taking them to trial provided there is sincere repentance. Transgressions referred to here include sex sins; intemperance; criminal acts involving moral turpitude such as burglary, dishonesty, theft, murder; apostasy; open opposition to the rules and regulations of the Church; cruelty to wife or children; and similar matters of a serious nature.

Aside from the open-ended concluding phrase, the only significant addition to previous guidelines is the explanatory phraseology characterizing suspect

criminal acts as those "involving moral turpitude." In addition, while not really breaking new ground, a new section in this edition brought together previous guidance on "Cases Where No Court Action is Required."

Two other editions of the *General Handbook* were issued during the McKay administration. Number 19, in 1963, was essentially identical to its predecessor on the points here under discussion. *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 20*, however, published in 1968, once again expanded the list of cases ("but . . . not limited to") to be handled by church courts. Now also included were "homo-sexual acts." "Cruelty to spouse or children" replaced "cruelty to wife or children." "Open opposition to the rules and regulations of the Church" was expanded to incorporate "open opposition to, and deliberate disobedience of" such rules and regulations. The Fundamentalist challenge was collapsed to a concise category indicting those "advocating or practicing so-called plural marriage." And, finally, there was a new proscription of "any un-Christian-like conduct in violation of the law and order of the Church."

The most recent *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 21*, issued in 1976, is more extensive and explicit on the grounds for church court action than any previous handbook. These were specified as follows:

1. Open opposition to and deliberate disobedience to the rules and regulations of the Church.
2. Moral transgressions, which include but are not limited to—
  - a. Murder (grounds for mandatory excommunication).
  - b. Adultery.
  - c. Fornication.
  - d. Homosexuality.
  - e. Incest (grounds for mandatory excommunication).
  - f. Child molesting.
  - g. Advocating or practicing plural marriage.
  - h. Misappropriating or embezzling Church funds.
  - i. Intemperance.
  - j. Cruelty to spouse or children.
3. Unchristianlike conduct in violation of the law and order of the Church.
4. Other infractions of the moral code.
5. When a member is convicted in courts of the land of a crime involving moral turpitude, such is prima facie evidence justifying excommunication by a Church court. Regular Church court procedures should be instituted and appropriate disposition made, but not until there has been a final judgment entered in the criminal action.
6. A request by an individual that his membership be withdrawn . . .
7. Parents requesting that names of unbaptized children be removed from Church records.
8. Where parents request in writing that the names of their baptized minor children be removed from the records of the Church. . . . [but only after specific guidance from the First Presidency on each case].

"Inactivity in the Church" was not "in and of itself" sufficient reason to summon a member before a court, and even "joining another church" was not "in itself grounds for excommunication or disfellowship."

So far as the standard endorsement of local flexibility was concerned, guidance was reduced to the long-standing comment that “young unmarried people involved in moral transgressions who manifest a sincere spirit of repentance” should be given special consideration. Nonetheless only two items in the now extensive list were explicitly labelled “grounds for mandatory excommunication”—itself a phrase newly added to the discussion. That other items were not all to be viewed in an identical light was suggested by a requirement that transgressions in several categories required First Presidency approval before excommunicated individuals were to be readmitted (by rebaptism) to the Church; otherwise this could be handled locally. Singled out were murder, incest, misappropriation or embezzlement of church funds, advocating the teaching of, or affiliating with, apostate sects that practice plural marriage, or excommunication while serving as a full-time missionary or in a few prominent positions in the church leadership (“such as” mission or temple president, member of a stake presidency, patriarch, bishop or high councilman).

While the 1976 edition of the *General Handbook* is the most recent, it is not the last word on the subject. There have been, to date, five supplements to this handbook; the most recent, printed in October 1980, is a revision of the handbook chapter on “The Church Judicial System”—a revision, in fact, of a completely revised supplemental chapter issued just the year before, in November 1979 (i.e., the relevant chapter in the 1976 handbook has been replaced twice in the last two years). These revised chapters provide local leaders with by far the most lucid and thorough discussions to date, and first make explicit the “redemptive” function of court sanctions. Among the changes will be seen a clearer distinction between when courts *may* and *must* be convened, as well as new instructions on inactives and criminals. Those involved in abortion are added to the list of members who “may [“should” in 1979] be brought before a Church court where the facts can be weighed,” and those undergoing “a transsexual operation” also are now [1980] to be brought to trial—as well as LDS doctors performing either of these procedures. The basic guidance on optional and mandatory cases is presented as follows in the 1980 chapter revision:

Church courts *may* be convened to consider—

1. Open opposition to and deliberate violation of the rules and regulations of the Church (including associating with apostate cults or advocating their doctrines).
2. Un-christianlike conduct.
3. Serious transgressions, including adultery, fornication, abortion, homosexuality, lesbianism, child-molesting, cruelty to spouse or children, theft, embezzlement of Church funds, misuse or embezzlement of other people’s funds, and any other serious infraction of the moral code.

Church courts *must* be convened when a serious transgression has been committed and one of the following circumstances exists:

1. At the time of the transgression the transgressor held a prominent position of responsibility in the Church: general Church auxiliary officer or board member, Regional Representative, mission president, temple president, patriarch, stake president, stake president's counselor, district president, district president's counselor, high councilor, stake auxiliary president or counselor, bishop, bishop's counselor, branch president, branch president's counselor, or full-time missionary. (Should there be any questions about full-time Church employees, including seminary and institute personnel, presiding officers should write to the Office of the First Presidency for clarification.)
2. The transgressor is guilty of murder.
3. The transgressor is guilty of incest.<sup>12</sup>
4. A transsexual operation has taken place.
5. The transgression is widely known.
6. The transgressor poses a serious threat to other Church members.
7. The transgression is part of a pattern of repeated serious wrongdoings, especially if prior sins have already been confessed to priesthood authorities.
8. The Spirit so directs.

Additional clarification, which should be consulted directly, explains that inactive members should not be called to court unless they are "influencing others toward apostasy" or "make a written request at [their] own initiative" for excommunication. By contrast, new guidance is also given that members who have joined other churches "should be cited and brought to a Church court." In a further clarification on criminal cases, local leaders are advised that conviction by a criminal court does *not* automatically require action by a church court, though the matter should be weighed "carefully" and a decision made based on "the seriousness of the offense." "Murder" (and incest and, now, transsexual surgery) still mandates excommunication, but the term is clarified to exclude some "circumstances . . . [in which] the death was caused by carelessness, self-defense, defense of others, or [there were] other mitigating factors. . . ."

Finally, in addition to the long-standing counsel on special care "with young, unmarried Church members who have been involved in moral transgressions . . .," a new section advises that when "a member voluntarily confesses a serious transgression committed in the past and his conduct in the intervening years demonstrates full repentance, a Church court need not be convened in most instances." However, in cases of "recent sin" the "confession may not remove the need for a court," indeed "it is possible to use information obtained through a member's voluntary confession as the basis for Church discipline."

The replacement chapters also give much greater attention to the transgressions which require additional action after church courts have rendered their verdict. As was the case in 1976, those excommunicated for incest, embezzlement of church funds, involvement with fundamentalist/polygamist groups, or while serving in a prominent position of leadership all still required First Presidency approval before rebaptism.<sup>13</sup> As of 1980 this is also required before

reinstatement even if such individuals were only disfellowshipped (a requirement previously unnecessary except when missionaries were involved). Especially notable has been the evolution of what constitutes "leadership" status requiring such extraordinary action. Transgressions by missionaries have long received special attention, but no handbook prior to number 21 carried comparable guidance on other assignments. Handbook 21, as noted above, specified that those excommunicated while patriarchs, mission or temple presidents, bishops, high councilmen, or members of a stake presidency, all required special approval before rebaptism. The 1979 replacement chapter stated that all of these—plus bishop's counselors—*must* also be taken to a church court in the event of a serious transgression, as well as obtain special permission to be rebaptized if they are excommunicated. The 1980 replacement chapter extends this considerably, adding to the list general church and stake auxiliary leaders, district and branch presidencies, and—in the case of rebaptism—full-time church employees. Additionally, the requirement for First Presidency approval, as noted, is extended to those disfellowshipped as well as those excommunicated.

Beyond this, the 1980 guidelines for the first time made explicit the situations in which "no readmission to the Church is possible." The first of these, murder, had been designated by D&C as a condition for which there was "no forgiveness," and this implication is evident in all handbooks since 1960. Much more surprising was the second specified situation: "In cases of . . . transsexual operations, either received or performed, . . . no readmission to the Church is possible." Indeed, "transsexual surgery" has brought forth the most extensive handbook proscriptions to date. In addition to the sanctions specified against members, "otherwise worthy" *investigators* who have already "undergone transsexual operations may be baptized . . . [only] on condition that an appropriate notation be made on the membership record so as to preclude [them] from either receiving the priesthood or temple recommends."

Thus, as noted at the outset, unacceptable behavior has been defined by the Church with increasing clarity over the years. More specific terms have been introduced in place of what initially was a rather broad guideline, and some of these terms have been explicitly defined. No comparable development can be seen in the area of intellectual or doctrinal "heresies" or "apostasy," excepting only the fundamentalist heresies so consistently condemned over the years. This is not to say that Mormons are doctrinally unrestricted, for there is nothing in the handbooks to prevent terms like "apostasy" or "opposition to" rules and regulations from being applied to non-fundamentalist heresies. While no statistics are available on this question, my impression is that "liberal heresies" are rarely dealt with in church courts. In part this is probably because extreme "liberal heretics" (for want of a better term) generally just drop quietly out of the Church, disappearing into the anonymous ranks of the "inactives." Less extreme deviation of this sort is most often responded to in more subtle ways, such as restricting opportunities to

serve in leadership positions in local congregations or stakes. Also relevant, no doubt, to the lack of church action against perceived liberal “heresies” is the lack of any real definitions of “orthodoxy” within the Church and, by extension, any definition of unacceptable “unorthodoxy.” Where “apostates” have seemed able to attract the attention of local church courts most often has been instances in which they have publicly attacked the authority or integrity of the church leadership. Even here “style” seems to be important. In a real sense it is not so much *what* is believed as *how* this belief is expressed that seems to matter most.

## II

The guidance given on the actual conduct of church courts has varied little over the years. The precedents are found in two sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, both of which appeared in the first edition in 1835. One, a revelation dated August 1, 1831 and currently published as D&C 58, had appeared as well in the Book of Commandments in 1833. This revelation designated a bishop “a judge in Israel . . . to judge his people by the testimony of the just, and by the assistance of his counselors, according to the laws of the kingdom which are given by the prophets of God.” The second precedent, currently found in D&C 102, is taken from the minutes of the organization of the high council in Kirtland in February, 1834. These minutes described the procedures to be followed in cases brought before the high council (e.g., on appeal from the bishop’s court, or in excommunication proceedings against someone holding the Melchizedek priesthood).<sup>14</sup>

Presumably because of the detail provided in the Doctrine and Covenants, the handbooks have said very little about high council courts. Until *Handbook of Instructions, No. 16*, essentially no mention was made of the subject at all. Since then the handbooks have simply summarized or referred readers to the relevant portions of D&C 102. For these reasons and because a high council trial was not part of the Sonia Johnson case which prompted this review, the specified procedures will be discussed only briefly.

In essence, a high council when presented with a case, first decides whether it “is a difficult one or not.” Depending on the perceived degree of difficulty, either 2, 4, or 6 of the 12 high councilmen are “appointed to speak” on the case. Half of the total council (including half of the appointed speakers) are directed “to prevent insult or injustice” to the accused, but none is to adopt an adversarial stance on behalf either of accused or accuser. The evidence (e.g., proceedings of a previous trial) is presented, following which

—“the councilors appointed to speak before the council are to present the case, after the evidence is examined, in its true light . . . and every man is to speak according to equity and justice.”

—“in all cases the accuser and the accused shall have a privilege of speaking for themselves before the council, after the evidences are heard and the councilors who are appointed to speak on the case have finished their remarks.”

—the president (now the stake president) then gives his decision and calls “upon the twelve councilors to sanction the same by their vote;” if a councilor can demonstrate an error the case theoretically is reheard, but dissenting votes are explicitly discouraged. In no instance is the high council in a position to “veto” the decision of the stake president. If during a reevaluation “additional light” is shed on the case, “the decision shall be altered accordingly.”

—while no longer emphasized, it was originally further specified that “in case of difficulty respecting doctrine or principle, if there is not sufficiency written to make the case clear to the minds of the council, the president may inquire and obtain the mind of the Lord by revelation.”

—there is also a provision for appeal of the high council court, to be made to the First Presidency who may choose to review the decision if circumstances seem to warrant.<sup>15</sup>

Much more attention has been devoted in the handbooks to the procedural aspects of the more common bishop’s courts. Even so, these have changed surprisingly little from the guidelines first included in the *Instructions to Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks No. 13*, in 1921. Rather than address these changes chronologically, however, I will summarize in detail only the policy set forth in *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 21*, which was in effect at the time of the Sonia Johnson trial. Variations from this 1976 edition, either in previous handbooks or the more recent supplements, will be noted where relevant. Ironically this particular handbook, while including a more extensive (and completely rewritten) discussion of church courts than anything to date, was less helpful in many ways than previous editions. Several significant lapses were corrected in the recent replacement chapters.<sup>16</sup>

Bishop’s courts can be convened in two basic ways. In the first, which used to be termed loosely, “on complaint and summons,” an individual brings charges against a member of the ward who in turn is summoned before the court by the bishopric. In the second, previously referred to as “by citation,” there is no specific accuser, and the case is initiated by the bishopric alone. This latter action, as explained in the thirteenth handbook, was to be used “in instances of wrong-doing, such as conduct violative of the law and order of the Church, teaching false doctrine, disobedience to Church regulations and requirements, encouraging any or all such evils by example or by open or covert advice—in none of which is any one member of the Church personally injured or aggrieved more than others.” Since under such circumstances, “[i]t may be that no person comes forth as the accuser,” the bishop could appoint two holders of the Melchizedek priesthood to investigate and make the complaint; or, the bishopric may issue the citation directly. Current handbooks no longer emphasize the distinction between these two approaches; and once initiated, the action in both cases is the same.

The summons to the accused is served personally by two members of the Melchizedek priesthood. (In the Johnson case, it was the two counselors in the bishopric). The summons states the time and place of the bishop’s court,

but does *not* detail the charges. The 1976 handbook, number 21, for example, provided a suggested format which proposed only the wording, “for investigation of conduct in violation of the law and order of the Church.” The Johnson case has been faulted by many because only vague charges were announced prior to the trial, but one has to go well back in church history to find a recommendation for anything but a vague pre-trial statement of charges.

The original handbook guidance in 1921 proposed that a summons include a brief “statement of important points to be inquired into, or investigation to be made,” but left only two lines in the suggested format for this to be accomplished. In 1960, Handbook No. 18 suggested that in cases in which “the wrong doing is well known, and no eyewitnesses are available, and some of the evidence must be obtained by direct questioning in a trial,” that the summons state the charges as “un-christianlike conduct” or “apostasy.” *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 20*, in 1968, stated clearly that the summons should not “contain specific charges,” and essentially the same point is made in the recent replacement chapters for Handbook 21 (“should not include any details or evidence”). Perhaps in response to some of the same types of questions raised in the Johnson case, these new chapters also suggest that those serving the summons have sufficient knowledge of the case “that they could make a simple explanation to the accused if necessary” to allow preparation of a response and the location of suitable witnesses.

Another criticism frequently heard in the Johnson case was that inadequate preparation time was allowed between the summons and the trial. As reconstructed elsewhere, the summons arrived late in the evening on November 14 with the trial scheduled just over two days later. Johnson requested an extension to December 1, and was granted a postponement until November 27. Reportedly at the direction of the stake president, this extension was cancelled and the trial convened on the 17th as originally scheduled. On further appeal at that time, the court allegedly was transformed into a “pre-trial planning session,” and the originally requested extension to December 1 eventually granted.<sup>17</sup>

As irregular as this may sound, there was no explicit guidance in Handbook No. 21 which directed to the contrary. The *preceding* seven handbooks, back to 1928, had indicated that if the accused could not prepare his defense adequately before the set trial date, he should be allowed a “reasonable” extension, but this point was *not* again made in 1976. While one presumes that the intent was still there, it is perhaps more important to note also that throughout all the handbooks, the final judge in such matters was the bishop himself.

The bishop’s “court” is comprised of himself and his two counselors, any of whom may chose to disqualify himself. If the bishop disqualifies himself, the case moves directly to the high council; otherwise, under Handbook 21, the disqualified counselor is replaced by the bishop with a member of the ward holding the Melchizedek priesthood. The accused may object to the personnel in the court, in writing, which objection is ruled on by the stake president. Historically the stake president could choose to transfer the case

to another bishopric within the stake, but since 1960 the only specified option is for the high council to take original jurisdiction (which it also may chose to do in *any* case within the stake).

In the Johnson trial, the first counselor had disqualified himself and was replaced by a high councilman from the ward. Historically, there was a requirement that the replacement be a high priest (Handbooks 13 through 20), who for a period of eight years could *not* be a member of the high council (Handbooks 18 and 19). The current, replacement chapter guidance does not prohibit high councilmen, but again requires appointees be high priests. Sonia Johnson also asked that the high council take original jurisdiction in her case, but they chose not to do so.

From the earliest handbook instructions, there has been a continuing requirement that the ward clerk (or someone appointed in his place) make a complete record of the proceedings, including the essentials of the testimony of all witnesses. Since 1976, the handbook has authorized him to use a tape recorder to assist in this task. The accused, however, can object to the use of the tape recorder, but once again, the bishop makes the final ruling. A major problem reportedly developed in the Johnson case when she asked to make her own tape recording. This ultimately was resolved by the bishop ruling that this could not be allowed. Although no specific guidance was given on this point in Handbook 21, it is relevant to note that ever since Handbook 18 emphatic instruction has been given that under no circumstances was a copy of the transcript of a trial to be given to the accused (or accuser). The intent was therefore clear, and as with other procedural questions, the bishop seems to have implicit authority to rule on these issues without further consultation.

When the trial actually begins, the bishop states the charges, to which the person pleads either innocent or guilty. (The hearing may proceed in the absence of an accused who fails to appear without sufficient justification). If guilt is confessed, the court can inquire further into the circumstances and then render a decision. If the accused pleads innocent, the case continues as discussed below.

The accuser (or, as in the case of Sonia Johnson, the bishopric) testifies first, followed by all of his witnesses. The accused may cross-examine each witness, and the court may both direct questions and cross-examine. Then the accused testifies, followed by his witnesses, with both direct questions and cross-examining by the court.<sup>18</sup> Ordinarily only church members are allowed as witnesses, a point again decided by the bishop. Witnesses are admitted to the proceedings individually (until 1968, the bishop theoretically could chose to allow all witnesses to be present for all testimony), and while they are waiting to testify, they are instructed (again, since 1968) *not* to discuss the case with other witnesses awaiting their turns.

A point of frustration expressed by several of the witnesses in the Johnson case was that they were barred from "mentioning ERA." Whatever one's feelings about the judgment of such a ruling, it is again well within the specified authority of the bishop. The very first handbook to deal with the subject stated clearly that the bishop had final authority on the admissibility

of evidence, and this has never changed. Handbooks 18, 19 and 20 all instructed that evidence should be "relevant, competent, and material," and that it was the church member and "not the church doctrine" that was on trial. *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 21* broadened this to "It is the Church member, not the Church that is on trial." One witness in the Johnson trial was said to have been "reprimanded" several times for continually bringing up the ERA. A reprimand or dismissal from the proceedings appears to be the limit to the sanctions available to the bishop under such circumstances. By contrast, as noted earlier, the first handbook to address the subject in 1921 specified that those in contempt of court could be reprovved, reprimanded, disfellowshipped or excommunicated. The notion of contempt of court was dropped altogether in the following handbook, which also made it clear (still implicit today) that "undue pressure" should not be brought to bear on witnesses who did not wish to testify. A final point relating to the testimony of the witnesses in the Johnson trial was the bishop's decision to impose a 1½ hour time limit on the December 1 proceedings. Although his decision was widely criticized after the fact, there is not now, and never has been any handbook guidance on the subject, pro or con. As ever, the broad discretionary authority given to the bishop would seem to allow a decision of this sort, if the intent were to limit testimony perceived to be redundant. The entirely arbitrary imposition of such a restriction presumably would be grounds for a dissenting vote by a counselor, or a rehearing of the case, but only if a reviewing body concluded that the outcome of the case had been materially affected.

Having heard all the evidence, the court can render its decision directly, or it can defer a decision for a short time and adjourn. The final decision is reached by the bishop alone, who privately seeks the "sustaining" vote of his counselors. Handbook 21 makes no explicit provision for the counselors to do otherwise, but the new chapters recently issued states that the bishop's decision should be sustained "unless they feel that the decision creates a serious injustice." These chapters further indicate that the decision "need not be sustained unanimously to be valid. The bishop is the judge. Any differences of opinion should be resolved, if possible, and must be kept confidential."

There has been some variation in the foregoing advice in previous handbooks. Initially, Handbook 13 had specified that at least one counselor had to sustain the bishop, or the case was to be retried or referred to the stake president. In 1940 Handbook 16 indicated that the decision had to be unanimous to be "fully acceptable;" otherwise it was to be retried or referred to the stake presidency for determination "as to further procedure." It was nonetheless emphasized that the decision was solely to be made by the bishop; the vote of the counselors was to "sustain" this decision. Although the wording changed somewhat, the same basic instruction was given until 1976, when Handbook 21 modified the instructions, as noted above.

When the final decision is deferred, most handbooks, including number 21, seemingly have required that the court reconvene at a specified date to

announce the decision. There is some ambiguity over the years, however, and other handbooks would seem to suggest that a second requirement—that the *written* decision be delivered as soon as possible to the accused—fulfilled this obligation. Written notification can be accomplished by a letter sent via two Melchizedek priesthood holders (as in Johnson’s case) or by registered or certified mail. Beginning with Handbook 21, local leaders were instructed to announce those excommunicated or disfellowshipped in local ward (or stake) priesthood meetings. Details of the cause were to be given only in cases such as “apostasy” in which members ostensibly are to be “warned” about the disciplined individual.

The principal options open to the court, should it find the accused guilty, have been disfellowship for an unspecified period of time (a minimum of a year has been suggested), and excommunication.<sup>19</sup> To these the latest guidance adds “probation,” a lesser sanction previously mentioned only in passing. There no longer appears to be yet another option specified in all handbooks previous to 1976: public confession in lieu of a trial. Bishop’s courts can disfellowship any ward member brought before it, but can excommunicate only women, and men not holding the Melchizedek priesthood.<sup>20</sup> In the past Melchizedek priesthood holders were disfellowshipped and referred on to a high council court, which does have the authority to excommunicate. In recent years the high council generally assumes original jurisdiction in these cases. The actual sanctions implied by these various decrees have been clarified (if not added to) over the years. The restrictions cited below are drawn principally from *General Handbook of Instructions, No. 21* and the recent replacement chapters.

Contrary to the popular, non-Mormon perception of these terms, neither excommunication nor disfellowship implies banishment from a Mormon congregation. Handbook 17, in 1944, advised specifically that such individuals “should not be avoided or persecuted. . . . They should be dealt with kindly and prayerfully, in the hope that they may turn from their mistake and receive again the full privilege of Church membership.” Similar guidance continues to the present day. Handbook 21, for example, encouraged local leaders to take a special interest in working with such individuals, and provided that home teachers continue to visit “disciplined” members.

A disfellowshipped member temporarily (but not necessarily “briefly”) cannot participate in “the full program” of the Church. Specifically prohibited are partaking of the sacrament; holding office; attending leadership meetings; speaking, praying or “otherwise participat[ing] in” any church meetings; attending the temple; or voting to sustain church officers. Expressly authorized is attendance at all regular meetings including priesthood (first authorized in 1980), the payment of tithes and offerings; and (if endowed) continued use of temple garments. “[U]pon evidence of sincere repentance, full compliance with the conditions imposed by the court, and a sufficiency of time to prove worthiness,” a disfellowshipped member may be reinstated, but only by the court originally passing sentence (not necessarily the same personnel) or a court “having superior jurisdiction.”

Excommunication is “complete severance from the Church.” All proscriptions noted in cases of disfellowshipment apply (attendance at priesthood is now authorized), and additionally tithes and offerings are not accepted from excommunicated individuals—although beginning in 1980 these could be paid “through a member of their immediate family who is in full fellowship.” Excommunicants also are not authorized to wear temple garments. If “found sufficiently repentant and worthy,” an excommunicated member—with the exceptions previously noted—can be rebaptized, but only with the concurrence of the excommunicating court (or, in some instances, the president of the stake in which it took place). Certain grounds for excommunication (and, since 1980, for disfellowshipment), as noted in the first section of this essay, also require the approval of the First Presidency before rebaptism can be authorized. In all instances, First Presidency approval is required before “the restoration of [temple] blessings” to previously excommunicated persons. (Such blessings are never “lost” by those disfellowshipped.)<sup>21</sup>

“Probation” involves a specified, temporary restriction on a member’s privileges, and is applied in cases where “the evidence does not seem to justify disfellowship, but it also does not warrant exoneration.” This sanction can also be applied by the bishop without convening a court. Insufficiently penitent members may still be disfellowshipped by a subsequent court; similarly, disfellowshipped members later may be excommunicated as well.

A member found guilty in a bishop’s court may appeal the decision—and presumably (but not explicitly) the sentence—through the bishop to the stake president. Under these circumstances, the options—which have been spelled out in some detail since *Handbook of Instructions, No. 16*, in 1940—are as follows:

- if the testimony appears sufficient, the high council simply reviews the case and either affirms or modifies the decision of the bishop’s court.
- if the testimony appears insufficient, they may rehear the case themselves.
- or, especially if there seems to have been some basic flaw in the original proceedings, they can direct that the bishop’s court rehear the case.

In the Johnson case, an appeal was made, and the case was reviewed by the high council, who affirmed the ruling of the bishop’s court. A further appeal to the First Presidency led to a decision that no further action was required.

In summary, while critics have accused the bishop in the Sonia Johnson case of having been the accuser, prosecuting attorney, witness and judge, in so doing he followed years of rather consistent guidance on church courts. Where some rare deviations from traditional guidelines are evident in the case, the actual handbook then in effect—*General Handbook of Instructions, No. 21*—can be shown to have departed from the previous language on the subject. Generally speaking, this variance was in the direction of less guidance or greater ambiguity, and much of this has been modified again in a subsequent supplement which regains the clarity of earlier guidelines.

Given the broad discretionary authority of bishops in such circumstances, one might argue that a different, perhaps less traumatic, course could have been followed. Previous handbooks, for example, suggest that there should have been less hassle over the delay requested in the trial date. Additional time could as well have been allowed for testimony during the trial itself. Final authority in such matters nonetheless rests, as noted repeatedly above, with the bishop himself, and it is very doubtful that a more elegant legal process would have changed the outcome. Within the church judicial system, the procedural subtleties are of little consequence in comparison to the personal judgments and “inspiration” of the presiding authority.<sup>22</sup>

If fault is to be found with the details of this case, it might better be directed at the ill-defined criteria and logic inherent in the evaluation of non-behavioral transgressions. It is a relatively easy matter—conceptually, at least—to establish whether a member is guilty of adultery, spouse abuse or embezzlement. “Apostasy” and “opposition” to the order of the Church are entirely different matters.<sup>23</sup> Before they can be assessed in church courts, definite lines have to be drawn, a process which at present is at best quite awkward, and more typically very inconsistent. For historical reasons, as noted earlier, such lines as exist are found only on the fundamentalist edge of Mormon orthodoxy. Notwithstanding the personal tragedy of the Johnson case—which one expects includes the bishop as well—I would guess that a poll of members along the frontiers of Mormon orthodoxy would overwhelmingly oppose further defining such lines. “Private heresies,” to use Sterling McMurrin’s apt description, still don’t disqualify most people from good standing, and one hopes this will always be so. Aggressively public heresies, by contrast, will probably continue to bring forth rare but painful episodes such as that of Sonia Johnson. Painful, because of the naive hope that imprecise definitions offer some protection after the trial begins; rare, because the same imprecision makes it unlikely that the Church will seek such individuals out—at least not before they long since quietly have withdrawn on their own.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Will Durant, *The Story of Philosophy*.

<sup>2</sup>A *Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ* (Zion, 1833), Chapter XLIV, verses 1–25, and *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, 1835), Section XIII, verses 6–7, both contain essentially identical wording to the present text quoted.

<sup>3</sup>“Fourteenth General Epistle of the Presidency . . .,” December 10, 1856, as quoted in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1965–1975), 2:201.

At the non-secular extreme might be placed the following from Brigham Young: “In regard to the law of tithing, the Lord has given the revelation I have already referred to, and made it a law unto us, and let all who have gathered here and refuse to obey it, be disfellowshipped; and if a man will persist in breaking the Sabbath day, let him be severed from the Church; and the man that will persist in swearing, cut him off from the Church, with the thief, the liar, the adulterer, and every other person who will not live according to the law of Christ . . .” *Journal of Discourses* 10:285, November 6, 1863.

<sup>4</sup>Clark, *op.cit.*, 3:102–104, quotes the first of these at length. He also includes the full texts of the succeeding circulars issued in 1889 (2: 179–183), 1897 (2:290–293), 1898 (2:306–309), 1899 (2:320–323), 1900 (2:328–333), and 1901 (3:14–16).

<sup>5</sup>The figure for 1913 was announced by President Joseph F. Smith in General Conference the following spring, and refers only to stakes. *Conference Reports*, April (4), 1914, p. 6. The more recent data was provided to me several years ago from the Presiding Bishop's Office, and includes missions as well as stakes.

<sup>6</sup>I have not seen figures for the early sixties or the mid-seventies, so cannot rule out an atypical bulge during the years for which I have data. I have personal knowledge of rather extensive, but geographically localized, excommunications around 1970 of children baptized into the Church under suspect circumstances during the early sixties.

<sup>7</sup>As quoted in Clark, *op.cit.*, 5:12, from a talk April 8, 1916.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, quoting statements from 1904 (4:85), 1910 (4:217–218) and 1911 (4:227).

<sup>9</sup>So far as I have been able to ascertain, this book was never published.

<sup>10</sup>As quoted in Clark, *op.cit.*, 6:25–27, from a First Presidency statement published in 1937. It is interesting to note that temple recommends under President Heber J. Grant ostensibly required that holders "keep the Word of Wisdom," but under George Albert Smith—as reflected in this 1940 handbook—they rather had to "observe the Word of Wisdom or express a willingness to undertake to observe the Word of Wisdom . . ." It was not until the 1960 handbook that this language was changed to a flat requirement to "observe the Word of Wisdom, abstaining from tea, coffee, tobacco, and liquor."

<sup>11</sup>Quoted from the twentieth handbook; number 21 differs slightly.

<sup>12</sup>Defined in the first replacement chapter in 1979 as "sexual relations between a parent and a natural, adopted, foster, or step child." The new chapter in 1980 added, "A grandparent is considered the same as a parent."

<sup>13</sup>First Presidency approval is also required for those whose cases they previously have reviewed and modified to require excommunication.

<sup>14</sup>Book of Commandments, Chapter 59; and D&C (1835) 15 and 5. A number of other sections of the Doctrine and Covenants are often quoted in discussions of church courts or transgressors, but those cited in the text are the only literal antecedents of the specific guidance in the handbook.

<sup>15</sup>Handbook 21 specified that the six high councilmen not directed to "prevent insult or injustice" to the accused "stand in behalf of the Church." No previous or subsequent handbook guidance makes this point, nor does the Doctrine and Covenants. In practice the instruction on the high council courts given in the D&C is not altogether clear. The most recent guidance (1980) finally tells these courts to follow the same procedure "as outlined for a bishop's court . . . to the point where all relevant evidence has been presented." As a practical matter, there is generally open discussion among the high councilmen thereafter, with the designated speakers addressing only the question of whether things have been presented fairly.

<sup>16</sup>Examples are noted in the text. Perhaps the most conspicuous error was in the interpolation of inappropriate guidance from high council trials into that of the bishop's court. See paragraph "7" under "Trial Procedures."

<sup>17</sup>For a reconstruction of the events immediately before and during the trial, see Linda Sillitoe and Paul Swenson, "A Moral Issue," *Utah Holiday*, Volume IX, Number 4, pp. 18ff (January, 1980). All subsequent references to specifics of the trial are taken from this article.

It is said that at the time the stake president refused the initial request for an extension that he also requested that Johnson's temple recommend be returned. While this normally would not have been done until after the court proceedings, bishops and stake presidents do not need court action to cancel a recommend if they feel circumstances warrant.

<sup>18</sup>This wording is essentially identical to that of Handbooks 13 through 19. Though expressed more broadly since then, the sequence is the same.

<sup>19</sup>At no time has specific handbook guidance been given as to when one or the other of these options is most appropriate, excepting the cases which require mandatory excommunication and the notation that Melchizedek priesthood holders cannot be excommunicated by a bishop's court.

<sup>20</sup>Within a mission, a branch president may be appointed as the presiding officer in an "elders' court" comprised of three men who hold the Melchizedek priesthood. This court follows the procedures of the bishop's court, but has the "authority to excommunicate any member in its jurisdiction"—at least since 1979.

<sup>21</sup>According to current guidelines there is theoretically no Temple "blessing" for which a sufficiently contrite individual eligible for rebaptism cannot eventually again also become eligible. Handbook 21 had specified that those excommunicated for adultery, whose families have broken up as a result, could not later be sealed to the individual with whom the adultery took place. The recent replacement chapters, however, add "unless it is authorized by the President of the Church."

<sup>22</sup>Handbook 21 had somewhat misleadingly asserted that church courts "generally follow established legal proceedings in courts of law to establish facts and arrive at the truth." The 1980 replacement chapter more accurately replaces this with, "When a Church court is convened it should be remembered that it is an ecclesiastical proceeding only and that the rules and procedures applicable to the courts of the land do not necessarily apply." Apropos this, the chapter ends, "In all instances, the First Presidency has the right to make exceptions to any Church court procedures as may be required by unusual circumstances."

That there are relevant secular constraints, nonetheless, is clear from the following guidance for those investigating accusations against ward members (1979 and 1980): "They should be instructed not to use questionable methods. For example, electronic surveillance devices, hidden cameras or tape recorders, or telephone 'buggings' must not be used; nor is it appropriate for Church leaders to hide around members' homes. Such methods could subject the Church and local priesthood leaders to legal action in civil courts."

<sup>23</sup>This is not an abstract consideration, for the latest (1979 and 1980) guidance on church courts specifies that "just prior to inviting the accused member into the court, the bishop should describe the case briefly to the court members and *should explain what constitutes guilt under the charge and what are considered sufficient grounds for action by the court.*" (Emphasis added.)

The "general handbooks" issued to date are as follows:

- Instructions to Presidents of Stakes, Bishops of Wards and Stake Tithing Clerks.* 1899 (14 pp.)
- Instructions to Presidents of Stakes, Bishops and Clerks,* 1900 (23 pp.)
- No. 3. Instructions to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Bishops and Counselors and Stake Tithing Clerks.* 1901. (43 pp.)
- Annual Instructions No. 4. to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, High Councilors, Bishops and Counselors, and Stake Tithing Clerks in Zion.* 1902. (38 pp.)
- Annual Instructions No. 5 to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, High Counselors [sic], Bishops and Counselors, and Stake Tithing Clerks in Zion 1903–1904* (28 pp.)
- Annual Instructions No. 6 to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, High Councilors, Bishops and Counselors and Stake Tithing Clerks in Zion, December 1st, 1904* (32 pp.)
- Annual Instructions No. 7. to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, High Councilors, Bishops and Counselors and Stake Tithing Clerks in Zion. December 1st, 1905* (33 pp.)
- Annual Instructions Number Eight to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Bishops and Counselors, Stake Clerks and General Authorities in Zion. December First, Nineteen Hundred and Six.* (34 pp.)
- Annual Instructions, 1908. Circular No. 9 to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks and General Authorities in Zion.* (38 pp.)
- Annual Instructions, 1909. Circular No. 10 to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, Bishops and Counselors, Stake, Mission and Ward Clerks and All Church Authorities.* (48 pp.)

*Annual Instructions to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, Bishops and Counselors, Stake, Mission, and Ward Clerks and all Church Authorities. Circular No. 11. January First, 1910. (40 pp.)*

*Circular of Instructions No. 12 to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Presidents of Missions, Bishops and Counselors, Stake, Mission and Ward Clerks and all Church Authorities. 1913 (52 pp.)*

*Instructions to Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks. No. 13. 1921. (72 pp.)*

*Instructions to Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks. No. 13. 1923 Second Edition (70 pp.)*

*Handbook of Instructions for Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks. No. 14. 1928. (96 pp.)*

*Handbook of Instructions for Stake Presidencies, Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks. Number Fifteen. 1934 (126 pp.)*

*Handbook of Instructions for Stake Presidencies, Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks and Other Church Officers. Number 16. 1940.*

*Handbook of Instructions. Number Seventeen. 1944 [reprint in 1949, minus what was to become the Melchizedek Priesthood Handbook, 128 pp.]*

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints General Handbook of Instructions. Number 18. 1960. (133 pp.)*

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints General Handbook of Instructions. Number 19. 1963. (146 pp.)*

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints General Handbook of Instructions. Number 20. 1968. (206 pp.)*

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints General Handbook of Instructions. Number 21. 1976. (123 pp.)*

[Supplements to this handbook have been issued July 1, 1976 (Number 1), April 1, 1977 (Number 2), and March 1, 1978 (Number 3). A replacement for chapter 8 in the handbook, "The Church Judicial System," was printed in November, 1979; this, in turn, was replaced by another chapter of the same title printed in October, 1980.]

## *FAWN McKAY BRODIE: AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW*

THE FOLLOWING is excerpted from a longer interview conducted by Shirley E. Stephenson as part of the Oral History Program at California State University at Fullerton, November 30, 1975.

*Mrs. Brodie, to begin, I would like you to tell me about your early background.*

As you doubtless know, my parents were devout Mormons and I was brought up in a small Mormon town of very great beauty in Ogden Valley which is just through Ogden Canyon and east of Ogden. There are three small towns there. One is called Huntsville and there is where my grandfather and grandmother, David McKay and Jeanette Evans McKay, built a house which is now over one hundred years old. Last summer [1975] we celebrated what would have been his one hundredth birthday, had he lived. He was born in 1875 in Huntsville, Utah. The children, grandchildren, and great-children gathered for this occasion. It was great fun. My grandfather was one of eight children. There were ten all together but two older sisters died of diphtheria in an epidemic. So this was very much the ancestral home; a big, old farmhouse with fourteen rooms and no bathroom.

My father divided his time between city jobs—he was at heart a politician. He was, for a time, president of the Senate in the Utah State Legislature. He then had a job as chairman of the State Utility Commission, so we lived in Huntsville, which we loved madly, despite the difficulties of living in this ancient farmhouse which was hard to heat, hard to clean, but wonderfully spacious and a great place to grow up. There were barns, a creek where we swam, and a river where we swam when we were older. It was an idyllic childhood as far as the freedom and the affection and the sense of belonging to a community was concerned. It was also very parochial.

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*How large was your family?*

I was one of five. There were four girls and I was the second daughter. The son came in the middle.

*How large is the family now, with grandchildren?*

Well, there were fifty-six at the reunion. I think there are about sixty-four of us all together.

*Would you continue about your family influence and the religious influence?*

Well, we were all brought up as very devout Mormons, and I was devout until I went to the University of Utah. Then is when I first began to learn important things. I had no anthropology but I had psychology and sociology. I think most importantly—my field was English literature—what was really important, as I realize now looking back on it, was that one ceased, or one began to move, at any rate, out of the parochialism of the Mormon community. At least I did by being exposed to the great literature of the past. This was a very quiet kind of liberation; there was nothing very spectacular about it. There was no active trauma. It was a quiet kind of moving out into, what you might call, the larger society and learning that the center of the universe was not Salt Lake City as I had been taught as a child.

But this was slow, and it was not really until I went away to graduate school at the University of Chicago that I understood how much of a liberation the university experience in Salt Lake City had been, because then the confining aspect of the Mormon religion dropped off within a few weeks. As I've said before, "It was like taking off a hot coat in the summertime." The sense of liberation I had at the University of Chicago was enormously exhilarating. I felt very quickly that I could never go back to the old life, and I never did. Even though I loved going home, it was going back into the past.

My father really never understood the nature of my break with my past. I think he tried to, but it was always very painful for him. He was always pulling me, trying to pull me back into the Mormon community, the Mormon society, back into the brotherhood. But he couldn't. I told him the university world was my world and not the church. He finally accepted it, but with a lot of pain because he was very devout and a Mormon preacher of considerable talent. He was rather high in the church hierarchy. As a matter of fact, he was, finally, what we call an assistant apostle and later his brother David became a president of the church, so the church was very important in the family life. My uncle was very much the family patriarch who dominated all of the McKay family, to an extraordinary degree, just like an old Chinese patriarch.

*Was this David McKay?*



David O. McKay.

*What about your mother's reaction?*

Mother was a kind of quiet heretic which made it much easier for me. Her father [George H. Brimhall] had been nominally devout but as president of the Brigham Young University he had brought in people like G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey as lecturers, and philosophers and psychologists who were fascinated by the Mormon scene. He was a very open-minded man and a fine educator. Some of this rubbed off on my mother and so I say, "My grandfather was not a heretic, but his children were," or rather some of them were.

Her heresy was very quiet and took the form, mostly, of encouraging me in a quiet way to be on my own. But that made for some family difficulties, too.

*What about your brother and sisters?*

Well, my brother is still a devout Mormon but my sisters are all, what we call, "Jack Mormons," since they are still technically in the church but they are not active and they don't go along with the Mormon dogma. They still count themselves Mormons.

*Do you?*

Oh, no. I am an excommunicated Mormon. I was officially excommunicated when the biography of Joseph Smith was written and published. About six months after publication, there was a formal excommunication.

*Would you care to explain more about that?*

I was excommunicated for heresy—and I was a heretic—and specifically for writing the book. My husband was teaching at Yale at the time and we were living in New Haven [Connecticut]. Two Mormon missionaries came to the door and presented me with a letter asking me to appear before the bishop's court in Cambridge, Massachusetts to defend myself against heresy. I simply told them, or wrote a letter telling them, that I would not go because, after all, I was a heretic. So then I was officially excommunicated and got a letter to that effect.

*This was because of writing the book No Man Knows My History?*

This is right.

*Were you allowed ample access to records and manuscripts when you were writing the book?*

Almost all of the material in the book came from three great libraries. At the University of Chicago, where I was working after I married Bernard, there was really a great collection of western New York State history. By going through the material I was able to find out something about the sources of Joseph Smith's ideas, particularly the ideas which went into the writing of the Book of Mormon. I finally ended up going to Albany, New York, where all the newspapers were kept which were published in Joseph Smith's own hometown in Palmyra, New York. So I was able to read the newspapers he had read as a young man. This turned out to be an absolute gold mine! A lot of the theories about the American Indians being descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes and the descriptions of what were being found in the Indian mounds were in the newspapers. The speculation was there. That was extremely important as was the anti-Masonic material. The anti-Masonic excitement was very strong at that time. Then I went to the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library. The New York Public Library has the best Mormon collection in the country outside of Salt Lake City.

I did go to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Independence, [Missouri], and I did go to the library of Salt Lake City for some periodicals, early Mormon periodicals that I couldn't get anywhere else. I was permitted to see those, but I was not permitted to see any manuscript material.

*Are those [church archives] open now? I read a comment indicating that it was believed that your book would open archival material.*

It had just the reverse effect. The archives were largely closed to scholars after my book came out.

*Was there a fear that someone else would do the same thing you did?*

That's right. I think I should be very exact in my statement. It is not quite true to say the manuscript sources were denied to me. I had been told that there was a diary of Joseph Smith in his own handwriting, written when he was in his early twenties. I knew one man at the Brigham Young University, who is now dead, who had seen it and read it. But when I asked to see it, I was told I could not see it. Then I had a very long, and very difficult interview with my uncle, David O. McKay. Afterward, he told me I could see the manuscript, but by this time the family situation had become so delicate that I felt that I would rather not take advantage of my uncle's name to use this material. I wrote to him saying I would not ask for any more material and I never went back to the church library. So, technically, I was given access, but I didn't use it. It was made very clear to me that it was an extremely difficult family situation, so that is the way I handled it.

*Was this after you began a career in writing? Had you thought about this long before your days at the university?*

Oh, I had always wanted to write fiction. I discovered after writing numerous short stories that this was not my forte. Then after I was married, my husband, who is Jewish and totally new to the Mormon scene, was very fascinated by it. In answering his questions, this stimulated the desire in myself to find out the roots and sources of what Joseph Smith's ideas were. In any case, I started out *not* to write a biography of Joseph Smith but to write a short article on the sources of the Book of Mormon.

In my research in the University of Chicago library, I thought I had found some answers. But, having done that, I had by that time done enough research to realize first of all there was no good biography of Joseph Smith and also I had to answer the questions myself. If the Book of Mormon came out of his own background in western New York, which he insisted came from golden plates, then what kind of *man* was this? The whole problem of his credibility, I thought, was crying out for some explanation. So then I moved into the much more difficult task of writing the biography. It was a piece of detective work that I found absolutely compelling. It was fantastic! I was gripped by it. I spent seven years doing the research and writing and I was fascinated the whole time. I was baffled by the complexities of this man and remained somewhat baffled even after the book was finished. It wasn't until fifteen or twenty years later when I had done a lot of reading in psychiatric literature that I felt I had some more explanations. I have tried to put a little bit of this in the supplement which came out in the second edition, in 1971.

If I were to write it over again, knowing what I know now about human behavior, I think I would do a better job; but on the whole, it holds up quite well. I am really proud of the book and stand by everything in it.

*What did you include in your supplement that you didn't have in the original edition?*

Mostly, it was a matter of trying to let the reader know what had happened in the Mormon research in the twenty to twenty-five years since the first edition. Some very important material had come out of the church library about the so-called "first vision" of Joseph Smith. It turned out there are three versions of the first vision, each one quite different from the other. This bore out my theory of the evolutionary character of the first vision.

Then there were some very important new data about the holy book called the Book of Abraham. I had been told, and everybody thought that the papyri which Joseph Smith is supposed to have translated of the Book of Abraham had been burned in the Chicago fire. It turned out that it had not been, that Emma Smith had sold it and it had ended up in the New York Metropolitan Museum. When that was discovered, it was given back to the church and

when the material was translated, it turned out to be just ordinary funereal documents, which is what most scholars had believed from the beginning. This was *extremely important* and that I put in.

But also, I felt that I had made some speculations about the nature of Joseph Smith's relations, and with his brothers in particular, and with his father and how that got into the Book of Mormon. That was something I had not realized before. I had not paid enough attention to his childhood, to his relations with his mother and his father, particularly his relations with his five brothers, because the Book of Mormon is a story of fratricide. It is brother killing brother all the way through. I felt this was an important idea which I had not sufficiently thought out before. I had skirted on it; that kind of thing. I felt, too, that there was more material on his mother and father that I had not used. So as I said, if I had it to do over again, the earlier portion would be more thoughtfully done. And, I think, too, I would discuss the nature of his identity problem, which I think was severe, in psychiatric terms. I could not have done it then because I did not know anything about it.

*Would you care to comment a little more on that?*

Well, it is just that I think he falls into a psychological pattern which had been written with very great skill by Phyllis Greenacre, a psychoanalyst, who did a wonderfully perceptive article called "The Imposter." She defines the "imposter," clinically, in a way that one doesn't normally think of an imposter. She discusses the identity problem the imposter has, the degree to which he needs an audience, and the degree to which the audience, you might say, connives in the impostership; they want to believe his claims. In this case, I think the audience wanted to believe that he was truly a prophet. So the two work together.

But it is not fair to describe him as a simple imposter. This was a very special, complicated story. I don't like to use models, but I would have used some of her material, I think, because it is extremely illuminating. I may go back and do a serious article on it someday.

*Do you feel that you answered, or rather, that you really did write his history in contrast to this statement, "that no man knows my history?"*

Well, I think I did much better than anybody else had. I assumed that there would be a better biography come along. It is astonishing to me that there has not been. But the book has stood up very well and perhaps one of the reasons that there hasn't been another biography is that not enough new material has come along to make it worthwhile. The new material that has come along has tended to verify my thesis rather than to destroy it. This has been very gratifying.

*In the new material that you have been able to obtain, or get access to, has . . .*

It all verifies the original thesis, that his was an evolutionary process from the very beginning, that the visions probably began in some kind of childhood dream and, at any rate, were very, very different from the way he described them when he began writing his history. The fraudulent nature of the Book of Mormon is, I think unmistakable; that has not changed. The devout Mormons still believe it to be the work of God. The “Jack Mormons” are pretty certain it is not, but still respect the organization of the church and feel that it does a great deal of good, so they stay with it. I can see that there are many things about the brotherhood that are very rewarding. But I think there is no question that the Book of Mormon was fraudulently conceived. This will always be a stumbling block to people who are trying to make converts.

*Was this part of your change? Did this contribute to your getting away . . .*

I was convinced before I ever began writing the book that Joseph Smith was not a true prophet—to use an old Mormon phrase. Once I learned about the scientific evidence, which is overwhelming, that the American Indians are Mongoloid, I was no longer a good Mormon. That was relatively easy. It seemed to me that it was decisive.

*What really prompted you to write about him at that time instead of someone else?*

Well, as I say, looking back, it was a rather compulsive thing. I had to. It was partly that I wanted to answer a lot of questions for myself. There were many questions that no one had answered for me. I certainly did not get any of the answers in Utah. Having discovered the answers and being excited about them, I felt that I wanted to give other young doubting Mormons a chance to see the evidence. That, plus the fact that I had always wanted to write, made it possible—not made it possible—made it *imperative* that I do a serious piece of history. I found the detective work exciting, but there was always anxiety along with it because I knew it would be difficult for my family.

*Were you still at the University of Utah at that time?*

No, when I was writing the book, I had a job at the University of Chicago library.

*As a librarian?*

I was never a trained librarian but I was handing out books in the Circulation Department. I loved it; the women for whom I worked were very sweet, and I had a certain time for reading, especially when I was on the night shift. My

husband was getting his doctoral degree at the university, so I had about two and one half to three years working the library where I was deeply involved in this major research.

*How long, totally, did it take you to do research?*

Seven years. But I had a job and was working most of that time. And then the last two years I had a baby, therefore, I never had full time to work on it.

*Did you have your master's degree at that point?*

Yes, in English literature. As an historian, I am completely self-taught. At that time, at the University of Chicago, the emphasis in English literature was on the historical method so I got very good training. Later, it changed and the emphasis was on criticism rather than on history. I received excellent training in historical method.

*Do you restrict yourself to biographies, exclusively?*

Yes, except for an occasional thing like the speeches here and there which are on more general historical topics. But I find biography is what I love and I am more comfortable with it. I am happier with the narrative technique than I am with the topical method. Essentially, I am a storyteller.

*And in this way you manipulate your heroes . . .*

All historians manipulate by virtue of the selection of the material. "Manipulate" is a nasty word. The good historian tries not to manipulate deliberately but to let the material shape itself. I found, especially with the Joseph Smith book, something fascinating. I was working with non-Mormon, anti-Mormon, and Mormon material and I would get three different versions of the same episode—always two, sometimes three—and when I put them together a picture emerged that I believe had nothing to do with me, nothing to do with my selection. I was just putting all the versions together and then, as I say, it was a little like building a mosaic: you don't create the materials, the materials are there. But somehow they fell into place, partly like a jigsaw and partly like a mosaic. It was not totally mosaic, it was a combination. It was not totally jigsaw either, but a picture emerged so often as I wrote these chapters that I thought this must be the way it happened. It was different from both the anti-Mormon and the Mormon version, but so often the materials fitted nicely. But what I wrote, of course, has been hotly contested by the Mormons, the devout Mormon historians, who have questioned every single line and who have gone back and read everything I wrote and found every small error and checked every footnote. But, this is the fate of anyone who writes controversial history.

The same thing is happening with the Jefferson book. I feel as if I am living my life over twice because it, too, is very controversial and the Jefferson establishment is very hostile. The book is not sold at Monticello, just as the other book was not originally sold at the church bookstore in Salt Lake City—I mean the Joseph Smith biography. But I think in time, the Jefferson establishment is more likely to come around to my point of view than the Mormon authorities in Salt Lake City.

*Do you get a lot of “anti” mail from devout Mormons?*

No, I have had surprisingly little over the years. I have had a great deal of mail—some of it very touching—but mostly from the young people who are on their way out of the church, are doubting, are unhappy, and are running into trouble with their families, and are writing for a little moral support. I have had many letters like that.

*Are they using this as a basis for their own beliefs?*

The young people who are moving out of the church find the book sometimes very traumatic and sometimes very valuable. Many of them write asking me about specific material in it. They want to go back and read what I have read. They don't “buy” it totally; they are influenced by it, but they want to go back and redo my research and this is very healthy.

*You have told me what prompted you to write about Joseph Smith. What about some of your other heroes?*

The reasons that any biographer settles on any specific topic are extremely complicated. Some of the reasons are unconscious and one never knows what leads one to choose; at least, one does not know right away. I would say that, at least theoretically, or superficially, the reason I chose Thaddeus Stevens was that my husband was teaching at Yale and I had two small children and wanted to write something out of the Yale Library. I would have liked to have done a biography of Eleanor Roosevelt but that was impossible; I was too confined, so I would stay in the nineteenth century. I had looked at numerous people and rejected them all. Roger Shugg, who was working with Knopf [Alfred A. Knopf], and then later became the head of the University of Chicago Press, suggested Stevens. So I began reading about him and again I became fascinated and I felt that this was the one I wanted to write about. Those are the superficial reasons. The fact that I had tumbled headlong into the Negro problem in writing about Stevens was not an accident; I felt it was important. Any historian has to come to grips with it sooner or later, but the more I read about Stevens, the more I felt he had been abused and vilified, that this man really had elements of greatness. So, in a way, it was the reverse of the Joseph Smith.

Here, I was rebuilding a reputation that had been abused. With Joseph Smith, I felt this man whom I had been brought up to respect as a deity did

not deserve that reputation. It was a total about face in terms of intention. It was good to be doing a positive thing rather than the destructive thing, because I had always felt guilty about the destructive nature of the Joseph Smith book. Although non-Mormons reading the book would never count it as being destructive, devout Mormons did, and quite properly from their point of view. The non-Mormons' response was extremely favorable, and the historians felt this was the first really fair biography of Joseph Smith. I gave him credit for his genius as a leader as well as exposing his feet of clay.

*When and why did you get into psychohistory or psychobiography, or has this been a trend all the way along?*

I would say that there is none of it in the Joseph Smith book except by inadvertence. I did read a lot about paranoia when I was writing about Joseph Smith because Bernard De Voto had called Joseph Smith a paranoid, and I felt that he did not follow the classical picture of the paranoid at all, as I read the literature. So I moved back and out of the field of psychological investigation because I was not satisfied with anything that I found. Then, as I say, there have been much better things done since. The article by Greenacre on the "Imposter" [*Psychoanalytic Quarterly*]; much more important research is available now than there was to me then. I still say Joseph Smith was not a classical paranoid, although it may be said that, eventually, he ended up somewhat paranoid because of persecution. But the persecutions were real! If the persecutions are real you cannot say a person is paranoid; it's only when they are unreal that you say he is paranoid. So I still would not say that he fit into that particular type. His problems were different.

With Jefferson, in handling this very controversial question of whether or not he had a slave mistress, I looked with great interest, for example, in one of his journals written when he was living in France. He had taken a trip to Germany and to Holland. I found that in his descriptions of the landscape he used the word "mulatto" eight times: mulatto hills, somewhat whitish, mulatto land. I thought this was very extraordinary since he used the word mulatto only twice in an earlier journal. Although the word mulatto was used to describe landscape in the southern part of the United States, still, I felt it showed a special preoccupation for him since the use of it appeared eight times after the arrival of Sally Heming in Paris; whereas, the earlier journal had been written before her coming. That is the kind of thing that is the window into the unconscious. It is very treacherous, that kind of material. I have been bitterly attacked by some reviewers for that. I think it is valid data. One must be careful with it, but I do think it is an important window. There are many other kinds, slips of the tongue, for example. It is extremely useful with Nixon who makes so many of them, because he is so tense.

With Burton, there were what you might call "free associations." Obviously, no historian can put anybody "on the couch." When a person is dead, we must make do with what we have. But when Burton wrote about his mother, in his short autobiography, if you look at the paragraphs in which

he mentions his mother and note what he said before and afterward, you will find he talks immediately about cheating, decapitation, mutilations, smashing—all the stories and metaphors are violent, negative, and hostile. After he began to write about his mother he was reminded of a mother who killed her children and was guillotined. He saw this woman executed. The immediate association to her from his own mother is very interesting. Again, that is the psychoanalytic approach. It is listening with the third ear. Again it is treacherous, but I think it is an important technique.

*You keep using the terms inner versus the intimate, would you . . .*

You mean, the inner life and the intimate life. Well, intimate life usually refers to the sex life, or the marriage, or relations with children and family. But the inner life is related to the intimate life. It is obviously bound up with it, but the inner life, insofar as one can get close to it, has to do with the inner conflicts that are at work in the unconscious, that are driving a person—man or woman—driving him to do whatever he is doing without being aware of these inner forces.

The presence of the unconscious has been known for generations, for centuries. When you read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the sleepwalking scene, you will see that he understood the unconscious mind. But it was Freud who learned how to tap it scientifically and to use it in therapy. We have learned a great deal from him and the clinicians who followed him, about tapping the unconscious mind and looking at inner conflicts. This is different from the so-called intimate life.

*You commented that with Smith you did not utilize this as much. There was one article written by Fisher that referred to the epilepsy in Smith's background and "that you rather dismissed the subject." He commented that it would be interesting to know what kind of relationship between the epilepsy and psychosis existed in your mind.*

Well, I did a lot of reading on epilepsy and decided right away that he was not an epileptic. To me it is inconceivable that anyone who knows anything about epilepsy and reads Joseph Smith's descriptions of his visions would say epilepsy was involved. An epileptic fit invariably ends in amnesia. The man or woman who has a fit remembers nothing about what happened. So to say that these visions of Joseph Smith were epileptic, is an absurdity. Epilepsy is a disease of the brain which is extremely well-known and a great deal of research has been done on it. Even fifty years ago, enough was known about epilepsy so you could not say these were epileptic fits. I think it was I. Woodbridge Riley who suggested it. He was supposed to have been a psychologist. He obviously did not know anything about epilepsy.

One of the first things I did working with Joseph Smith was to go through all the literature I could find to satisfy myself that it was not a factor. These were not fits that he had. They were dreams or visions. He mixed up dreaming

and vision and dreaming and having visions. In the Book of Mormon, he has a character say, "I dreamed a dream, or, in other words, I had a vision." I think he mixed up his own dreams and later came to call them visions as indeed his father had. His father was a visionary man, and his mother thought the dreams were so important she wrote them all down. His father's dreams got into the Book of Mormon. That is one of the reasons why his mother's volume is so important as a source material because you can compare her descriptions of his father's dreams and the dreams of Lehi in the Book of Mormon, the great original "Father" of all these sons. They are strikingly similar. At least, I noted that when I wrote the book. I was sufficiently sensitive, at that point, to pick that up right away.

*Did he include dreams of his brothers at anytime? Or misconstrue them?*

We don't know. If his brothers had dreams, he did not report them—or, at least, his mother did not report them. If he dreamed about his brothers, I don't know, but certainly the Book of Mormon is a remarkable fantasy, as I said, about brothers killing brothers. But we do know, and again this is one thing I missed when I wrote it, Joseph Smith was very nearly killed when he was a teenager. Someone shot a gun and barely missed him and hit a cow instead. Nobody knew who did it. What's more, his older brother died—this I did mention—and for some reason, the body was dug up by the father later, because rumors spread in the town that somebody else had unearthed it. So the death of the older brother, again, I think, was terribly important in his life and I underestimated the importance of it. And the shooting, the near shooting—who was shooting at Joseph Smith? Why? There were all sorts of mysteries here that I didn't begin to try to explore.

*Have you thought about exploring them now?*

No, that is too far away. I am interested in other things. Certain things you put behind you and they somehow stay behind you.

It was a *terrible* ordeal to just go back into the literature and write the supplement. I had been collecting material for twenty years, but I did not want to do it. Friends kept pressuring me so I decided I must do it. I am very glad I did, but it was like walking back into a swamp. Mormon historiography is a swamp. You get up to your neck right away, it is so complicated. What is a fact? That is a big question. No devout Mormon and non-Mormon can agree on what is a fact. So it is terribly hard.

*It depends on who does the writing.*

Right. Because if you believe that Joseph Smith is a true prophet, you write in one way, and if you believe he was not, you are going to write in another way. There is *simply* no meeting of minds; there never will be.

*What about later leaders of Mormonism?*

It is easier, I think, to come to some understanding about them.

*Have you anticipated writing about any others . . . ?*

No. But as I told you, I thought about writing about Brigham Young many times but I always backed away from it feeling that I had gone the road with the more complicated and more interesting man. I still think Joseph Smith was one of the most fascinating men in American history.

*About how long a period of time does it take you, usually, to do a book?*

The Jefferson book took five years. The Burton book took five years. I won't tell how long the Thaddeus Stevens book took except to tell you a story about my second son. When Nancy Hitch, who was the wife of the former president of the University, Charles Hitch—they happened to be good friends of ours—asked my son, "Bruce, how long did your mother spend writing on Thaddeus Stevens?" He said, "I don't know, Nancy, but it seemed to take all my life." (laughter) In fact, it took all his growing up [years]. I started when he was, well, just after he was born and it took a very long time. Then we had another child and we moved several times, we built two houses and I put it away for a long time. I decided I was through writing. I had three children which was enough. Three children is enormously fulfilling. It wasn't until my daughter was three or four that I went back to the manuscript and picked it up again and decided I could not leave all those notes unused. I had done a tremendous lot of work and I was not going to stop.

*Have you ever thought of writing on women?*

Eleanor Roosevelt is the only one I ever wanted to write about. I spent about six months researching her and then my publisher said, "Don't do it because Lash is doing it and he was her very good friend and had a much better opportunity to meet and know many of her friends and members of her family." My publisher was right; it was very good advice. I am very glad I didn't, because I could not have done what Lash did, not without infinitely more work at any rate. But then I went on to do Jefferson and that turned out to be in many ways the most rewarding of all my books. He was an authentic genius in every way, though Burton was a genius, too. Stevens and Joseph Smith had elements of greatness, but nothing like Jefferson. The richness there is beyond belief.

*Do you feel that there are females "important" enough, shall we say, that they should be written about?*

Oh, yes. There are many that are wonderful and there are books being written about them. There is Golda Meir and Indira Ghandi, two women who are going to be written about extensively by biographers.

In American history, I must say, the president's wives are not a very impressive group of women. Most of them fall into the category described in the old cliché about women in Washington: "Washington is made up of talented men, and the women they married when they were very young." I would say this is true of most presidential wives. What a dreary group they are! But a part of the problem, of course, is that there is a tradition that they must not meddle in politics. They must be dutiful wives and mothers and they must not speak out. One did speak out; Mary Lincoln did, and she was bitterly and furiously criticized for it. It was not really until Eleanor Roosevelt that we had a woman who could speak out and did speak out with distinction and talent. She was widely hated but she was a great force for good. We have not had one since. Lady Bird [Johnson] comes the closest with her beautification program, but that is a nothing compared to Eleanor Roosevelt's record.

*I don't find the suffragettes terribly exciting . . .*

I have some students working with them, and they are writing some very interesting things about suffragettes, but I have not as yet settled on one that I thought I would want to spend five years with. I just find someone like Nixon far more exciting, or more challenging.

*How about the modern feminists? Do you go along with some of the actions of the feminists?*

People have been so kind to me. I really have managed to get so many rewards without asking for them. I was asked to join the faculty at UCLA by Eugen Weber when I was between books. I didn't have the academic background in terms of a doctor's degree in history. I had a great publication record—great in my eyes—and, apparently, they thought it was good enough to be asked to come into the department. So I have been treated well; I didn't have to fight my way up the ladder. It is only now when I see the trouble my young women graduate students have that I understand what all the complaining is about. For myself, I did not have to get in there and yell. I have worked extremely hard. I worked much harder than most of the women I know have had to work, but that is because of some kind of mad, inner compulsion which has to do with God knows what. I think I have had the perfect life because I was able to raise my three children and work at home, and not have to abandon them to nursery schools or baby-sitter's. I not only had the pleasure of raising them myself, which was wonderfully rewarding, but I was

able to write at the same time. When I see my graduate students having babies and teaching and trying to write, it is an intolerable burden! I think everybody is suffering, the husbands are suffering, the children are suffering, the wives are suffering. I think it is sad. I would like to see some kind of part-time teaching arrangement worked out but that seems to be impossible.

*Do you go along with some of the actions of the feminists?*

I don't pay very much attention to them, really. A lot of them are shrews. I guess I am terribly old-fashioned in that respect. I agree with my husband when he quotes, I guess it's King Lear, "Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, an excellent thing in a woman." And yet, I can't help but admire what they are doing. I believe that women have been abused and are still being abused. I go along with this, it is just that I am not a joiner or an organizer—I work alone.

*You are not a feminist exactly in the way they feel?*

I am a feminist, yes. I am all in favor of everything they are agitating for, I really am, because I see definite discrepancies in pay. I get paid about one-third less than my husband. We are both full professors and my publication record is as good as his. It came late, but I don't think I would ever have as much. There are very real discrepancies in pay, in the system.

People have been so kind to me. I really have managed to get so many rewards without asking for them. I was asked to join the faculty at UCLA by Eugen Weber when I was between books. I didn't have the academic background in terms of a doctor's degree in history. I had a great publication record—great in my eyes—and, apparently, they thought it was good enough to be asked to come into the department. So I have been treated well; I didn't have to fight my way up the ladder. It is only now when I see the trouble my young women graduate students have that I understand what all the complaining is about. For myself, I did not have to get in there and yell. I have worked extremely hard. I worked much harder than most of the women I know have had to work, but that is because of some kind of mad, inner compulsion which has to do with God knows what. I think I have had the perfect life because I was able to raise my three children and work at home, and not have to abandon them to nursery schools or baby-sitter's. I not only had the pleasure of raising them myself, which was wonderfully rewarding, but I was able to write at the same time. When I see my graduate students having babies and teaching and trying to write, it is an intolerable burden! I think everybody is suffering, the husbands are suffering, the children are suffering, the wives are suffering. I think it is sad. I would like to see some kind of part-time teaching arrangement worked out but that seems to be impossible.

*On your awards, I noticed that you had a fellowship and another award with the Commonwealth Club.*

Oh, the Commonwealth Club of California. It is up in San Francisco. They give an award to books published by Californians every year. That was for the Stevens book, I think. My first was a Knopf fellowship in biography; that was before the book was finished. Knopf, in those days, was giving \$2,500 to young scholars as a combination. Part of it was an outright grant and part of it was an advance against royalties and I won that before the Joseph Smith book came out. So I was able to spend some money doing traveling to research Joseph Smith which was very nice.

*They didn't consider you a Utah resident?*

I was living in Washington at the time, as Bernard was in the Navy; that was during the war. The book came out in 1945.

*I didn't realize he had been military.*

Yes, he was a Navy Lieutenant.

*I guess you didn't say too much about him. You started with your family.*

That's true. Well, Bernard is marvelous. He has encouraged my writing. Without him I would have never been able to do it. If I had had a husband who was hostile to my writing, as many husbands are, I think it would have been impossible. As it is, he was fascinated—I think he was by Burton, both Joseph Smith and Burton . . . also Jefferson. He was never as interested in the Stevens book, but he was a very good editor. I would give him my chapters to read when they were written as well as I could do them. He has a fine sense of style and can catch a bad sentence and improve a word here and there. He really read them with great care. He is a very, very fine editor but essentially, it was the encouragement that I got from him which was wonderful. I wouldn't say he coached me, he's never been a women's libber ever, but there was this understanding of how important it was for me to keep doing this. He knew I was a lot happier when I was writing than when I was not writing. When the children were born, he recognized that. So that has been wonderful.

*Is your husband from Utah?*

No, he is from Chicago. I met him when I went back to do graduate work at the university. I got married the same day I got my master's degree. We married in the morning and I went to the graduation ceremony in the afternoon. I was so exhausted I slept through the whole thing! I don't know what was said or who said it. (laughter) I was just there in my cap and gown.

*What of his writing career?*

He had published two books by then. His doctoral dissertation, which was *Sea Power in the Machine Age*, and his second book, which he wrote while we were at Dartmouth, was *Guide to Naval Strategy*. He has been a very productive scholar in military history and national defense.

*More military than political?*

It is a combination of the two. He belongs to that group of what they call the "scientific strategists": Henry Kissinger, my husband, Robert Wolstetter, Herman Kahn and a whole group of people, who, especially after the A-Bomb, began to write about the defense systems, the effect of the A-Bomb on world strategy, or national strategy. He joined Rand Corporation after he left Yale. Some of these men were gathered together at Rand and then they all went various ways. Henry Kissinger was never at Rand; he was a consultant. Bernard was one of the earliest of the scientific strategists.

*Are there any articles on your list of publications that you highly recommend I read?*

If you have read through my books, that's enough. The most important things are in my books. These others are all incidental. I have very mixed feelings about one article on presidential sin. I don't think my husband likes it too well.

*Didn't you give a paper like that in Utah?*

Yes, I gave it at Utah. There is nothing psychoanalytic in this. It has to do with an old concept: lying and sin. I talk about the Ten Commandments and the Seven Deadly Sins and Quaker Sins. From one point of view, at least.

*The Mormon group liked it?*

Yes, they were very responsive.

*Mrs. Brodie, I certainly thank you for being so gracious. I have really enjoyed the time with you.*

# FICTION

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## ANOTHER ANGEL

R. A. CHRISTMAS

*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.*

Revelation, XIV:6

### I

PROFESSOR R. L. ROBINSON woke up on a jet from Los Angeles to Paris and discovered that his wife of one day was not in her seat. He had fallen asleep during the movie, and she, it was clear, had turned off his headset, and the overhead lights, and left him to it. The champagne had done—no, was still doing—its work. It was close to midnight by his watch and the plane was quiet; the spaces—inside and out—mostly dark.

He turned himself on and began a survey of the radio channels. Comedy: it was that Vietnamese kid who did a take-off on Ted Kennedy. Rock: Bob Dylan's old "Popera." Next was Mozart, so he lingered. He packed his pipe and relit—but it wouldn't hold—so he put it back in his pocket. He closed his eyes again.

When he opened them there was light coming through the window, and the seat beside him, he noticed immediately, was still empty. It was certain now that his wife had collapsed in the restroom, and no one suspected what lay behind the locked door. She had been sucked out of a faulty hatch and had plummeted, silently, into the Atlantic—while he snored. For a few seconds, Robinson's mind rang drowsy changes. Then he was moving up the quiet aisle.

He found her, sitting in the empty forward lounge. She was hunched over—elbows planted in uplifted knees, chin wedged in her hands. A stubby

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paperback was open on the table in front of her, and her face was concentrated. As Robinson entered, one hand started down to turn a page.

"Good morning," he said.

"Well hello," Holly said, straightening up, smiling. She pushed a strand of brown hair from her eyes.

He sat down. She kissed his cheek.

"The film was a bore," she said. "I didn't want my light to bother you."

"It wouldn't have," Robinson said. "I was blind. In fact I still am, a little."

He glanced to see what her book was. "You'll never guess what I'm reading," she said.

She took the book by the open halves and turned it over. He saw hazy, vertical bands of bright and pale blue, and on the right side a golden figure, robed to the ankles, standing on a gray ball. The right hand held a long, single-stemmed, golden trumpet to the lips; the head of soft curls angled back—blowing a blast. On the other side was the title, *The Book of Mormon*, in white letters.

"Where on earth did you get this?" he said, taking it from her.

"At the used bookstore," she said. "Do you mind?"

Robinson closed the book and turned it over in his hands. It had a familiar weight and thickness; except that the ones he remembered had black covers and smaller angels.

"Charles told me you used to be a Mormon," she said. "I was just curious."

"He did, did he," Robinson said, handing the book back. He took his pipe out while Holly lit a cigarette. When the stew came by they could get some coffee.

"Look at this," Holly said.

She turned to a page that had a dark ballpoint circle around a verse. Robinson leaned over and read:

2. Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me; wherefore, it was not after the manner of men.

"It's so repetitious," she said.

"Yes it is."

"It's all sort of like that," she said. "It isn't anything like the Bible."

Robinson struck a match. "Well," he said, between puffs, "it was all written by one man."

"That's not what they say."

"No," he said. "But the style is his, at any rate. That's what gives it that wordy tone."

He reread the passage.

"It sounds like he's buying time," he said. "Trying to think of what to say in the next verse. He just repeats himself until he's ready to move on."

Holly was nodding and tapping her cigarette, so Robinson read another verse. This raised two images in his mind, and he knew the connection between them perfectly well. The first was of a young man in farming clothes, sitting in a room that had been divided in half by stringing up a blanket. There was a wooden box on the floor near the man, and he was holding a black hat, upturned, in his hands. He was bent over, gazing at a stone in the bottom of the hat. On the other side of the blanket there was another man, dressed like a schoolteacher, sitting at a desk. Every now and then the man with the hat would say something, and the man at the desk would write it down.

The second image Robinson saw was simply himself as a young man, reading *The Book of Mormon* on a bus headed into Los Angeles.

"It's really strange," Holly was saying. "A bunch of Jews build a ship and go floating off to South America. It's sort of like what you'd get if you asked John Bunyan to rewrite the *Aeneid* or something. Maybe it's some kind of folk epic disguised as a bible. Is there anything in print on this?"

"Nothing respectable," Robinson said. "There might be, by now," he added, "but I wouldn't know about it."

"I bet I could track a lot of this down in English and early American sources. Folklore, sermons, things like that."

"A lot of people would be grateful if you did," he said. "But I wouldn't recommend it."

"Why? It's American lit. It's in my field. I'm surprised *you* haven't done it."

"I wouldn't touch it," Robinson said. "It wouldn't be worth your time."

"Why?"

"Because there's nothing there. There's nothing literary about it. It's simply propaganda."

He glanced out the window. They were over land now, a horizon of small farms, purple-grey in the dawn. The one place this does not look like, Robinson noted, is Utah. But that was a thought he had not expected to have on his honeymoon.

"Do you think those witnesses really saw the gold plates?" Holly was saying.

"Nope."

"Do you think they lied?"

"Who knows," he said. "I think they thought they saw something. I think they wanted very badly to see something, so they did."

"It does make you wonder," she said after a pause.

"The book is designed to make you wonder," Robinson said. "That's the best reason I know for not believing it."

"How did you come across it in the first place?" Holly said. "Your parents aren't Mormons."

"There was a girl," Robinson said, trying to find the right tone.

"Your first wife?"

"No. Before that," he said.

"Now we're getting somewhere."

"If you like."

## II

Senior English, Inglewood High School, 1957. Robinson, Smith—we sat together on the back row. She was new—from Utah. A Mormon. Her parents owned a restaurant, and they were getting rich because they gave ten percent of everything they made to the Mormon church and tried to keep all of God's commandments. I was a Methodist, but I told her I had no morals and she threatened to "send the missionaries over." She couldn't keep religion out of her head—not for more than a few minutes. But she also worshipped Scarlet O'Hara, and she had read *Kings Row* twice and *Forever Amber*. Some days she wore so many crinolines she had to fold herself into her desk. She had a nineteen-inch waist, but she wanted a waist that a man could circle with his two hands. Her mother had had nine kids, and *she* was going to have twelve.

I was president of the class, but I didn't have a date to the graduation prom. I didn't even think to ask her until the last minute. She wasn't what I would have called pretty. She was a little too tall; her hair was too curly on top, and (this puzzled me) slightly darker in back. Her cheekbones were too high and rosy, her mouth was full of teeth and her calves were skinny. She made up for these defects by trying to have what we called in those days "a great personality." She thought it was almost sinful to be shy. She also thought it was possible to be romantic without "committing adultery." She had been "sweet-sixteen-never-been-kissed." Unfortunately, her younger sister hadn't even made it to fifteen. It finally dawned on me that I was amused by the way she talked (partly because she shamelessly flattered and flirted). I figured that if we didn't "make out" after the prom, at least there would be no awkward silences.

"I'll bet it was a blow to your ego," Holly said.

"It surprised me," Robinson said. "I don't think I'd ever been turned down before."

"You mean you had to become a Mormon before you could take her out?"

"Not really. It was just a bluff. But I fell for it."

She was dying to go with me (I could tell), but when they came down from Salt Lake the girls had all taken a vow not to date non-Mormon boys. But she promised to plead my case at their next family council if I would just wait a few days and please not ask anybody else. After all, this was her once-in-a-lifetime high school graduation, so she deserved a teeny-weeny exception.

"Did they open your mouth and examine your teeth?"

"Not quite. I remember they asked me a lot of questions about my family and my goals in life. They wanted to know what church I went to and whether

I thought it was ‘true’ or not. I never thought much about my church one way or another. I was just a Protestant like everybody else.”

“Deep down you probably felt like telling them to shove it.”

“I should have.”

“I can just see you, with that murderous little polite smile on your face. I’ll bet you decided to seduce her then and there.”

“Not hardly,” Robinson said.

There were at least six bedrooms, two fireplaces and a maid’s apartment over the garage out back. The front door was eight feet of solid something with a big brass knocker in the middle, and just inside there was a stairway that would have made Rhett Butler pause. Carma slept in a four-poster bed with a pink canopy—I was allowed to see it on my short tour, accompanied by a chorus of giggling sisters.

But they hadn’t lived this way for long—they let me know right off that this had all started with a small cafe in South Salt Lake. They were new money, full of enthusiasm and wonder at their success. We sat in the panelled study and her father played and sang a hymn on their new organ. A couple of the little girls recited poems and her mother gave me a copy of *Think and Grow Rich*. Carma’s older brother was a missionary in Finland. They showed me his picture with the girl who was waiting for him to come home so they could get married. I was uneasy, but I liked them all right away and I think they liked me. I felt from the beginning that I was going to “pass,” and that this was just a formality that would have to be endured. Her mother especially thanked me for helping Carma with her English papers. She said if it hadn’t been for me Carma probably wouldn’t have graduated. She said the rule about not dating non-Mormon boys was entirely the girls’ idea, and the girls, she announced, had voted to make an exception in this case. All the little ones clapped and cheered at this, and I blushed—which made everybody laugh. After that, we had refreshments. Carma’s mother wanted me to understand how important a temple marriage was to each of them, and I acted as if I did when really I didn’t.

Graduation night Carma said that for every person living on earth there were at least a hundred evil spirits who wanted to inhabit their bodies because they couldn’t have one. Her little cousin flew around the room until her father called the demon out by the power of the priesthood. The Three Nephites and the Apostle John were still alive and might turn up anytime, anywhere; and there was a place called Kolob, which was a star or something where God lived where one day was equal to a thousand years. Somebody was doing genealogy work and found a hundred-year-old newspaper on their doorstep one morning. Utah looks just like the Holy Land turned upside down, and there are pictures in the *National Geographic* to prove it. Joseph Smith saw God the Father, and his son Jesus Christ, the Angel Moroni, Elijah, Moses, John the Baptist, Peter, James, and John—and if you had faith it could happen to you too.

I was sitting in the kitchen one night thinking about these things. I had finished the Book of Mormon, and I believed in a church I had never attended.

My parents were away on vacation, and I was sure something terrible was about to happen, because people who had faith received visitations. And they were twice as tempted and tormented because they had found the truth. Two hundred evil spirits were probably assigned to them. I tried to read, but I couldn't shake off the sense of a presence. Whether it was good or bad I couldn't really tell, but I knew I was afraid of it. I wouldn't be up to it alone. I prayed a little, and then I went to the telephone. I dialed every number but the last, waited too long and got the siren. Yes, it would look like I was doing it for a girl. I dialed the whole number. Worse yet, someday I might think I had done it for her.

An hour later I was at a Mutual dance with my two hands almost around Carma's waist, and she was beaming up at me. After that I figured I was in love, which justified everything until the day came when I decided I had figured wrong.

Suppose Sister Smith, in a silky fat nightgown, had suddenly turned on the lamp and said, "All right, when's the wedding? Don't move, I want Brother Smith to see this. The whole house asleep, and here you two are having sexual intercourse at three o'clock in the morning. And we thought we could trust you. Get your hands off your faces, and stop crying. Look at me, young man. It's a beautiful thing, but it's not free for nothing. Look at this, Lloyd. Sit up now, and tell us what you think you owe one another. Rodney, I wonder what your parents are going to think when I invite them over for a little early breakfast?"

That was the only way it could have been. They lay upstairs on their bed and wondered and worried, but we were only mushing on the sofa, or grinding away in my car, or rolling around on the floor of the study until four A.M. for five straight nights, frenching until our tongues were raw. They wouldn't have admitted it for the world, but they wanted it. It might have been my salvation, but I couldn't take the hint they never would have thought of giving. A thigh for a thigh.

Carma and I, at the piano in the living room. I'm trying to learn how to play "O My Father." Sister Smith strides in dressed in satiny black and a broadbrimmed black straw hat. Asks me would I like to take a little trip, to check out a restaurant she and Brother Smith are thinking about buying.

It's about ten and we head downtown. Sister Smith steers the big Buick and tells me a story. I can see she's happier than a sow in the shade.

"I thought you might like to see what happens to people who don't live the principles," she says.

A little tour of the plant. The man—husband—does most of the talking with a forced cheer plastered over fatigue. (When you've been caught in Vegas with one of your waitresses it takes it out of you.) The woman—his wife, his partner—offers a cutting comment now and then, when he forgets something, or when he doesn't.

Turning lights off and on, opening closets and cupboards, explaining machinery, showing us the parking out back. Sister Smith prevents silence

with questions: the help, the daily figure, their banks, suppliers—prods a naugahyde stool, clacks a freezer door. I try to look like something besides eighteen-year-old boy. Everybody knows that everybody knows.

Finally, in a corner booth. Wife brings me a coke from behind the counter, which I politely accept and dutifully sip (“Every now and then you have to,” Sister Smith says later). They talk, about \$20,000 apart. I nurse my poison, all ears. Suddenly, Sister Smith turns to me, smiling roundly, and says,

“Perhaps, I should ask my future son-in-law if he thinks he can handle this.”

She chuckles, and it’s clear I don’t have to answer. Just try to look modest and happy. The owners manage faint smiles, but I see they can’t believe it. Their life’s work in my hands. I smile back, but I can’t believe it either.

They resume their haggle. Husband lights another cigarette, his hair in sandy tatters. Mrs. Fierce Menopause puts hers out. I sit there wondering if it wouldn’t be better if I went away to college first, for a thousand years.

“You panicked,” Holly said.

“Not right away,” Robinson said. “I was always too polite to say what I really felt, so the whole thing dragged on for months. By then Carma had left college and moved back home—to wait for the wedding, I guess, or for me to officially propose or something. I didn’t realize what was going on. I was just trying to survive Stanford. We wrote almost every day, but we couldn’t keep it alive. So when Easter week finally came I went down and pulled the plug. I thought her mother was going to kill me.”

“Did she make a scene?”

“Not exactly. I figured all hell was going to break loose, so I gave Carma the bad news the night before I went back. Late. Her dad I could have handled—he would have understood—but I was afraid to face her mother. So all I know is what Carma wrote me afterwards. She said her mother was thinking of suing me for breach of promise, and I guess she threatened to get me excommunicated too. Carma said she would never regret loving me because it had helped me join the Church, but she was afraid that someday my ‘lust for power’ was going to destroy me. She was always dramatic. I think she woke up her parents right after I left. All I know is her mom had her packed and half-way to Provo before morning.”

“Was that the last you saw of her?”

“No. I saw her at Church after that, when we were home on vacation.”

“Did you ever try to get back together?”

“Not really. We went out a couple of times, but that was about it. I had my eye on a girl up at school by then. But nothing ever came of that either.”

“What about her mother?”

“She finally cooled off a little. At least she never followed up on her threats. Needless to say, I avoided her as much as possible.”

“You were quite a cad.”

“Indeed,” Robinson said. “Let’s get some coffee.”

## III

From Orly, they went straight to the hotel and to bed—because of the time change. In the afternoon they wandered along the river poking in book-stalls, and that evening they rode up to the Place du Tertre and had dinner, under the Sacré Coeur.

Robinson's book was virtually finished, so the summer looked more like a reward than a chore. In Paris he might check a manuscript or two at the Archives Nationales, but aside from that, nothing. In ten days they would cross to England; there were a few things he had to do at the British Museum and the Bodleian, but this would take a week at most. Holly had her dissertation to think about, but so far she was just reading around. After London, a drive through Scotland, Ireland. They might take a cottage for a month, somewhere. Then back to the continent.

They had both been in Paris before. This time, they decided, there was nothing they had to see, nothing to miss. They would start out late in the morning, let the Metro whirl them somewhere, and then walk back, shopping, people-watching, practicing French, holding hands. In the late afternoon find a restaurant, get a little drunk and return not long after dark. They did go to the theater twice, and once they ducked in and saw an American movie. At odd hours Holly kept at her Book of Mormon, and Robinson was reading *A Moveable Feast*, just for a lark.

"Guess what," Holly said, one morning when they were relaxing at the hotel. "I think I've discovered the secret of this book."

"Which is?" Robinson said, without looking up from his Hemingway.

"It's so outrageous," she said, "but at the same time so pious and preachy, that it creates an impression of truth. It forces it on you."

"It works on your fears," Robinson said, turning a page.

"I guess it's like the big lie. The bigger it is the more powerful it is. It's a strange feeling."

"It's the rhetoric," Robinson said. "Just as you say."

"It's probably the same feeling you had when you first read it."

"Could be."

"Jesus Christ visits the Western Hemisphere after his resurrection and preaches to the Indians. The *white* Indians. This has got to be the ultimate American fantasy."

"You may have something there."

"I still can't help wondering if by some weird chance all this actually happened."

"It didn't."

"I know. But there's something about it that makes you wonder, even when you can see right through it. Maybe it's just the style. It's so preposterous. So deadpan. It's such a flop, really. Why would somebody make all this up?"

"Why do people write books," Robinson sighed. "A profound question."

The next afternoon, as they were walking through the Luxembourg, Robinson said:

"This is where Hemingway first met Gertrude Stein. He says he can't remember whether she was walking her dog or not, or whether she had a dog then or not. But this is where he met her."

"I wonder where it was," Holly said. "I mean the exact spot."

"He doesn't say."

"I'll bet it was right here," she said. "That's why you thought of it."

"We'll never know," Robinson said. "Shall we stand everywhere just to make sure?"

They decided to walk to the rue Cardinal LeMoine, where both Hemingway and Joyce had lived, and then down the rue Mouffetard to the Place St.-Michel where Hemingway had done some writing. When they got there they found a cafe and feasted on a baguette and Préfontaines.

"I don't feel much like writing," Robinson said after a while. "I don't think this was Hemingway's table."

"Try not to think about it," Holly said. "Tell me," she added. "Are there Mormons in Paris?"

"Of course. There are Mormons everywhere."

"Is there a Mormon temple here?"

"Not that I know of. There's one in London. We can go see it if you like."

"I might like," she said. "Did I tell you I was in Salt Lake City once? We just drove through. My father wouldn't stop."

"I'll drink to that," Robinson said.

Dear dead town. Always grey, always sad. Crossroads of the West, once. Now only the crossroads of a psyche. Depressing, because you know what they wanted it to become, and at the same time you see what it has become. Just another city, tired mother of suburbs. 'And this is Mr. and Mrs. Young's bedroom,' your guide says, and it sounds so conventional, so singular. The sheepish tourists move down the hall. Postcards with bags of salt attached. Prostitutes on Second South joking about customers who won't take off their garments. A town not modern or holy or clean or dirty enough to exalt or debase the imagination. 'I lost my sugar in Salt Lake City.'

"Were you married to your first wife in the temple," Holly asked, "for eternity or whatever they call it?"

"Of course," Robinson said. "Who's been feeding you all this stuff? Charles?"

"I've asked some people a few questions," she said. "I'll stop if it bothers you."

"I just don't see the value of it," he said. "It happened a long time ago, and it's all over."

"You do mind," she said.

"Not really. Go ahead."

"Were you and Phyllis married in the temple?"

"No. Phyllis isn't even a Mormon."

"So in the eyes of the Church, you and your first wife are still married. As far as the next life is concerned."

Robinson had to laugh. "It's written on a piece of paper somewhere," he said. "But it doesn't mean anything. God isn't going to force people to stay married to each other, I don't think."

"What are the temples like inside? Is it just one big hall, or what?"

"Many rooms. Some big, some small."

"What's it like to be married there?"

"It's different. But one isn't supposed to talk about the details."

"You can't even tell your wife?"

"The last of my scruples," Robinson said. "Merely a courtesy."

"But why, if you don't believe in it?"

"I'll tell you all about it someday," he said. "I just like to add to my guilt one drop at a time."

"I can see you've really got a lot of it," Holly said.

"I was joking."

"But you have," she said. "I think you can still feel guilty about something you no longer believe in."

"I guess." Robinson lit his pipe and glanced out at the street. It was still there—Paris.

"It doesn't matter to me," Holly said, "as long as it doesn't bother you too much."

"It doesn't bother me at all," he said. "What put that idea in your head?"

"It's pretty clear."

"In what way?"

"In the way you say things."

"Like what for example?"

"Nothing in particular. Just everything."

"Oh for God's sake," he said. "That's ridiculous."

"I don't think so."

"But I don't take it seriously, for Christ's sake. That's why I joke about it. If I took it seriously I sure as hell wouldn't make fun of it."

"You could," she said. "It's not as simple as that."

"You're splitting hairs."

"Not really."

"Jesus Christ," Robinson said. "Can't we drop this subject?"

"If you didn't take it seriously," she said, "you wouldn't give a damn how I felt about it. But it's clear that you do give a damn. Because you don't want me to take it seriously."

He didn't answer that. He drank up, motioned to the waiter, and they got out of there, walking back to the hotel in silence.

It was a glorious afternoon—the streets filled with banners and honking. A light breeze and a rare blue sky. Shops freshly baited with things to eat and look at. Just like the song said.

Robinson strained after it, and failed. They might just as well be walking round and round Temple Square S. L. C. His honeymoon was coming apart. Turning into a goddamned cottage meeting. Christ! He was furious—pretending to sightsee. His stomach was a tipsy knot.

He was afraid to let out his anger, for fear of losing her. But he would have to let it out, or he was sure to lose her. He touched her arm and they stopped.

"If you ever want to join the Mormon Church," he said, "believe me, I won't do a thing to stop you. You have my full approval to do whatever you want to do."

He bent to kiss her but she turned away.

"Why don't you stop being so damned polite," she snapped. "Why don't you tell me what you really feel."

All right, he thought. I guess this is as good a place as any.

"I hate it," he began. "I hate it, and I hate everything it stands for. And I'm damned mad at you for even bringing it up. I've spent most of my adult life trying to get away from it, so if you ever want it you can pack your bags at the same time."

"That's more like it," she said.

There was a bench nearby so they sat down.

"I don't have any intention of becoming a Mormon," she said after a moment. "But I'm going to study it, and I think I'll do my dissertation on the Book of Mormon. If you don't like it, tough."

"If it's all right with your committee, it's all right with me," Robinson said. "Just don't bother me about it."

"Don't worry, I won't."

"Fine."

"You creep," she added.

"You nut." He reached over and took her by the back of the neck. There was nothing like having your first fight in the heart of Paris.

"I know what," Holly said. "I'll prove it a fake and destroy the Church. Just for you."

"You don't have to go that far," Robinson said. "I don't believe it already."

They started walking again.

"Tell you what," he said, after a few blocks. "The next time we pass a pair of Mormon missionaries I'll point them out to you."

"You mean you've already seen some?"

"I think so. I can usually tell."

"Do they wear some kind of uniform?"

"No. Just dark suits, sometimes hats. Very clean-cut Americans."

"That doesn't sound like much to go on."

"It's enough," Robinson said. "Some of them look like people I used to know."

#### IV

Their second and last Sunday in Paris Holly got up and went to late mass at St.-Germain-des Pres. Robinson slept in, met her outside the church, and they found lunch near the Place St.-Michel. From there, they took the metro across the Seine and up to the Place de L'Etoile, wandered through the Arc de Triomphe and back down the avenue toward the Concorde, browsing idly

through shops, with tickets to London marked for eight P.M. riding in Robinson's coat pocket.

"What ever happened to Carma?" Holly asked suddenly, "I mean after you broke up, and she went back to college. What did she do after that?"

They reached the other side. She let go of his hand.

"She got married," Robinson said, "and had five kids in something like six years. It didn't do much for her figure."

"You saw her?"

"Now and then," he said. "I even had lunch with her a few times."

"After you were married?"

"Yes. When I was in grad school she dropped by the office one day, and one thing led to another. But not to another. I never slept with her, cross my heart. I wanted to, but I never did."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing she lost her nerve and told her husband. He made a big fuss. Accused her, threatened me. So we gave it up. They were divorced a few months later."

"And you were the cause."

"Not really. They had lots of other problems. She didn't cause my divorce either. By that time she was remarried and had even more kids."

"So you never did get together."

"We never would have," Robinson said. "I saw her a few times when she was divorced and I was still married, but there wasn't enough there."

"On your side or hers?"

"Mine. I was the one who cut it off."

"Do you know if her second marriage lasted?"

"Yes," Robinson said. "It didn't. She's divorced again, as far as I know."

"You've seen her?"

"No. She writes now and then, care of the department. About once a year."

"What does she say?"

"Repent. Go to church. Things like that. I guess I'm the only person she ever converted, so if I don't make it to Mormon heaven she says she's coming down to hell after me."

"And what do you write to her?"

"Nothing," he said. "I don't respond."

They walked on down the avenue, Robinson thinking that for a long time it wasn't going to matter where they were, that she was going to live only in these conversations until she found him all out. So why not volunteer a little information? After all, the girl had some catching up to do.

"What about her mother?" Holly was saying. "Is she still alive?"

I remember we had been rolling around on the grass down at the park. While I was holding her, I slipped my hand inside her blouse and unhooked her bra, and she got mad and made me hook her back up right away.

When we were inside the front door Carma's mother called to her immediately from the upstairs bedroom. I waited for a moment at the base of the

stairs and then went into the study and picked up a copy of the Improvement Era lying on the 'Postum table.' Pretty soon I heard Carma calling, from the top of the stairs, for me.

When I came in Carma was standing flushed beside the bed with a couple of towels in hand and her mother was telling her to go downstairs and find the doctor's number in the desk directory. I could see two or three bloody towels on the tile just inside the open bathroom door.

Sister Smith was lying flat back on the bed without even a pillow. The blankets had been thrown aside to the floor and the sheet was drawn up over her slightly raised knees to her chest, her feet elevated, like two white spires, probably on the missing pillows. Carma set off without a word or a glance. Sister Smith had a gray smile on her face for me.

"Father's downtown," she said. "I can't reach him. I need a strong man."

"What do you want me to do?" I said.

"Go downstairs," she said, "and tell Gary to keep the little kids out back. Then I want you to go to the linen closet in the back hall and get me a large stack of towels. The big ones. I don't want to float out of this bed before the doctor comes."

I ran down, told Gary, and made two trips with the towels because the first stack was so large I dropped half of it on the stairs.

When I came back in Carma was in the bathroom—I heard the toilet flush—and Sister Smith was on the telephone explaining it all to a receptionist. The doctor was out. She said it was an emergency, and then she put her hand over the mouthpiece while they tried to reach him.

"I want you to help Carma clean me up a little," she said.

Carma came out of the bathroom, and I helped her raise Sister Smith so we could put fresh towels under her, and then we spread new towels all over the lower half of the bed. I turned away while Carma sponged her mother off with another wet towel and pulled the sheet back up.

"Anything?" Sister Smith said. Carma shook her head.

Sister Smith closed her eyes and put her head back, the telephone still at her ear, and Carma and I stared at each other across the bloody bed. Finally Sister Smith said "Thank you very much," and handed me the receiver.

"He's going to call an ambulance and meet me at the hospital," she said. "Carma, get a couple of my new nightgowns out of the drawer and my good robe and slippers out of the closet. And pack some things in my traincase. It's on the shelf in the closet."

We waited about twenty minutes, and during that time she passed some large clots and each time I helped her raise up so Carma could take them away and replace the towel. Once, while Carma was in the bathroom Sister Smith said very quietly:

"My tithing baby."

I nodded, pretending to understand.

"I'll bet you think I'm a foolish old woman," she added.

"No," was all I could say.

"Your mother would," she said.

I couldn't answer that, so I looked out the window. My mother would have thought it foolish, I knew, but my mother didn't know about the millions of spirits in the pre-existence. She didn't know they needed bodies so they could come to earth and be tested. She didn't know how many Mormon women had given their lives for that principle.

I went down at the bell and let the attendants in. They hustled their litter up the stairs and put a dressing on Sister Smith while Carma and I pawed through the closet for the slippers. Then they eased her onto the stretcher, buckled the straps and we followed them down. The ambulance was backed into the driveway, and they opened the rear door and rolled her in. One of them opened the side door and let Carma in, and I handed her the traincase.

"We'll be at Daniel Freeman," Sister Smith said. Carma looked away.

"If you hadn't come home when you did, she might have died," Holly said.

"I doubt it," Robinson said. "You couldn't kill that woman near a telephone."

"But she lost the baby."

"Of course. But that didn't stop her. A year or so later she had twins. A boy and a girl. She spent almost the whole nine months flat on her back and the doctor wouldn't let her leave the hospital without a hysterectomy. Beautiful kids."

"You've seen them?"

"Years ago," he said. "From a safe distance."

They continued down the avenue and Robinson turned the conversation to a small scandal they both knew of at the university. They passed two more blocks in this way and then stopped, when Holly turned abruptly to peer into a shop window. At almost the same instant Robinson saw the two young men, darkly dressed and looking like twins, who had come onto the avenue at the next block and were walking in the same direction, away. He fixed them for a second, then tugged at Holly's sleeve.

"There's your Mormon missionaries."

"What?" she said, without looking. She took a step closer to the window.

"Mormon missionaries," Robinson said. "I'm almost positive."

"Where?"

He started her up again, nodding his head to indicate the ones he meant. "Those two," he said, adjusting his stride to theirs and weaving from side to side to keep them in full view for his wife to study. They were both wearing American-style suits and ties, and one was carrying what looked like a triple combination—the Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, and Doctrine and Covenants—all in one volume with a zipper cover. They were both very pale and had unusually short haircuts, and they were walking almost in step, talking and laughing. Robinson felt sure of it now, so he increased the pace.

He kept this up for about a block, not saying a word, as if his prey, the missionaries, might hear him, until he came to a difficult knot of strollers. As the knot broke, slowly and awkwardly, in front of them, he took Holly's arm and started to push and guide her, moving into a long stride.

"Let's catch up and meet them," he said, shifting her quickly in order to pass a couple who had stopped, right in the middle of the sidewalk, for a kiss. "Just for the hell of it."

He felt some resistance, but he kept up.

"Let's not be silly," Holly said. She seemed out of breath already.

"What's so silly about it?" he said without slowing. "It might be fun."

She pulled back very hard and stopped them.

"What are you doing?" Robinson said.

"I don't feel like it," she said.

"Why not? You've been talking about it all week. Why not meet the real thing?"

"I'd just rather not," she said.

"They won't mind."

"I don't want to," she said. "If you want to, go ahead. I'll wait right here." She turned and looked into a dark shop.

Robinson glanced up the street at the two figures. For a moment they disappeared in the crowd. Then he saw them cross the street and go into a building. He was surprised. It was a movie theater—or was it the place next door? There were some people in the way, so he didn't actually see them go in.

"They're gone," he said. "Forget it." He turned to his wife and saw that she was still staring at her shadowy reflection in the window, her back to him. He nudged her. "Hey." She didn't respond. She closed her eyes. She looked like she might be about to cry. But she didn't.

THOMAS F. ROGERS

## *Limbs*

*. . . For Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.*  
—Gerard Manley Hopkins

With her weak left hand  
Rachel measured the mandrakes  
For Jacob's tea.

But we must pass over,  
From point of pain to point of pain,  
From frail left to mighty right wing.

Each with her deception:  
Mother Sarah loosed Ishmael,  
Mother Rebekah Esau,  
Mother Rachael her sister's sons.

But for us there is no loosening.  
The pain must penetrate, enter the palm,  
Break through to open sky.  
No dalliance. No half measures.

Later the Children  
Went a whoring after strange gods  
And kings.

For us no such carefree ostentation.  
We raise the hand in greeting,  
But no one sees the hidden scar.

The schoolmaster instructed them  
How to walk and where to turn  
And on what days.

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THOMAS F. ROGERS, professor of Russian at Brigham Young University, is also well known as a playwright in the Mormon community, the author of *Reunion and Huebener*.

But for us no prodding, no penalty prescribed  
Only the double sureness  
As, welding arms at points of pain,  
We bring each other forward

Till, standing in the mist,  
Wrestling, like Jacob his angel,  
With cut, disjointed knee,  
We fall and . . .

By the ram's horn  
The walls of Jericho were leveled  
And never again the same.

. . . face the One  
And, brought to embrace,  
Find the words and calmly smile.

Because we did not please that world too much with us  
But in our constant reaching, our strangeness and solitude,  
Took his path. . .

A crooked path made straight.

. . .and bore his pain.

Now, linked together, sealed,  
A seamless garment,  
Clasped by those who love us,  
No longer strangers,

We bear his many names—  
Counselor, Prince of Peace,  
Brother, Son, Omniscient Father,  
Author of fathomless Light and Love—

“And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee,  
Or, to return from following after thee:  
For whither thou goest I will go.”

And find both him and them  
Our natural Home.

## REVIEWS

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### *Mormon Arts—A Contradiction: A Review Essay*

*Arts and Inspiration: Mormon Perspectives.* Edited by Steven P. Sondrup. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1980. 157 pages. \$8.95.

Reviewed by KARL KELLER, professor of English at San Diego State University and a former member of the Board of Editors of *Dialogue*. He has published books on the Puritans and on Emily Dickinson and is at work finishing two books, one on Walt Whitman for The Johns Hopkins University Press and one on the Church for Doubleday, *The Mormons are Coming, the Mormons are Coming*.

Bernard Shaw once quipped that a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms. And one would think that it is likewise a contradiction in terms to refer to Mormon arts. To prove that this is not so is the purpose of Steven Sondrup's little collection of essays.

Can the spirit and the senses unite to make fine works of art? Can dogma and artistic forms work peaceably together? Can the Church yield to the modern? Can a Mormon make it in the marketplace? Why the lack of mutual support: the Church indifferent to the arts, its artists indifferent to the Church? Why bother? These are all questions that have been raised before, but Sondrup's contributors take us through them once again with feeling, sometimes attractively, sometimes poorly.

A total outsider might wonder at all the worrying over such an issue, like the tongue over a tooth that just will not come in right. Until he recognizes, of course, that among fundamentalist faiths Mormonism is a very pushy religion, even in the area of the arts ("anxiously engaged in a good cause"), even when it wants its

thin production of the arts to look good ("anxiously engaged in a good cause"), and even when its talk about such matters is flashier and more solid than its actual creations are ("anxiously engaged in a good cause"). Mormons want that tooth to come in, to come in right, even when it may not be there yet.

Then that outsider would probably sense how practically all Mormons see this in terms of a "problem." And since Mormons like to think of themselves as problemsolvers, then there must be a solution somewhere. The "problem" of "arts and inspiration" to which these anxious solvers address themselves (oddly enough very few here see the "problem" in terms of arts *versus* the inspiration!) is articulated in one way by those who are in positions of church authority or supporters thereof and in quite another way by those, who see the arts leading the Church to enlightenment. These are, of course, at odds with each other, though the participants in such a fine debate don't always seem to recognize that fact, but try to walk both sides of the tracks: a life of art, a life of inspiration.

Sondrup has his book start out with comments by that self-appointed Apostle to the Arts, Boyd K. Packer. Packer shows, however, that he knows virtually nothing about the arts, even while he claims that God speaks to him on such matters, and when he says he has been "called" to "warn" Mormons to create more spiritually and to create solely for the Church and its plan. To recommend the singing of Church hymns over all other art forms, to sell C. C. A. Christensen over all other painters in the history of the world, and to try to badger English professors to teach Orson F. Whitney as one of the best poets in literary history is

just plain silly. It seems that everything else, to Packer, is "degraded"; it seems that everyone else is "climbing the wrong ladder." His motto is that everything artful in the Church must be "appropriate."

Other writers in this collection of commentaries do not seem to see that they are not part of the solution but part of the problem. Most of these writers posit a fake opposition between "the world" with its arts and "the Church" with its arts, following a century or more of church-authorized paranoia about such things. No such entities exist, of course. The arts are always in and of and by and about and for this world, and then they may be projected onto some heaven afterwards for whatever spiritual ends one may have in mind. That intelligent but equivocating meliorist Wayne Booth says on this point: "The best hope . . . is [for the Church] to cultivate an artistic culture that will, by its nature, counteract what 'the world' offers," but must these be made enemies thus? Karen Lynn, in what is far and away the best essay in this book, answers this by saying: "The arts cannot be central to Mormon life no matter how many times we may claim otherwise," to suggest that they are one and the same or they are nothing. "Mormon culture" *vs.* "the world" sets up two monsters with no faces; better, it seems to me, to drop the whole cosmic drama which Packer and many others work hard to sustain and talk about something else: how to create rather than how to fight the world or help the Church or accommodate the two or merge the two.

Another error which mini-authoritarians fall into is to cite hot scriptures to justify the existence of the arts or to cite hot features of the arts to justify the existence of religion. "The status of the scriptures in the Mormon community," writes Karen Lynn, "works against an unequivocal endorsement of subsequent creativity." The favorite citation of Mormon critics is the weatherworn one that Edward Hart in his essay works over once again: "Man is that he might have joy," taking joy, if you are esthetically-minded, to mean esthetics, when it may mean no such thing. One needs scriptural sentences to justify that which one individ-

ually finds joy in doing, and so one cites it, hoping no one will see the equivocation but will somehow sense one's own interest to be God's interests. Another art-scripture exercise that goes on in these essays is to find dance mentioned in the Old Testament and then feel okay about dancing in 1980; or to find singing mentioned in the *Doctrine and Covenants* and then feel okay about singing in 1980; or to find joyous shouting mentioned in various places in the Bible and to feel okay shouting joyously in 1980 (though nothing rock or New Wave or bright or broad or wild, please!) At this late point in the development of human thought, does one really need scriptural precedents for being creative, for being oneself, for adding to the Creation, as Debra Sowell does here in order to dance well or Reid Nibley does here in order to play piano well or Ruth Hoen does here in order to sing well?

The funniest critics here are those who see "the world" coming to an end, following scriptural and authorized apocalyptic talk, and creative Mormons are needed to make a "new world" or even "new worlds." The whole universe, apparently, will hang as by a thread and the more sensitive, artful-craftful Mormons will make the new thing beautiful. Millennializing the arts, however, places an enormous burden on them and may eventually encourage hyperbolizing the trivial and arrogating the approved or just stop things altogether. Composer Merrill Bradshaw is a genuine quack millennialist in his essay: "We are faced with the challenge of doing for the kingdom, and thus for the thousand years of the Millennium, what Athens did for Greece, or the Medicis for Florence, or the Elizabethan Age for England . . . . And we shall achieve it!" When meek Mormon musicians inherit the universe, according to the less-than-meek Bradshaw, smiling, "We must supply *all* the music of a kingdom, . . . cover *all* the needs of the kingdom . . . . When the time comes, we will have to learn new modes of entertainment. What a splendid challenge!" Wonderful if this can be done, but maybe one should wait for a little more evidence that it *can* be done. Hope, after all, is lies until

you make it true. This lying to oneself is a form of Mormon dishonesty which Wayne Booth, Nicolas Shumway, Karen Lynn, Reid Nibley and Edward Hart deplore in their comments. To announce, as Packer encourages one to do, that one is great or that one will be great, or that the Church is great and will be great, is neither here nor there. One cannot fake it.

Now for the other side of the tracks. "There can never be a great Mormon art growing out of directives from Church leaders," writes Trevor Southey. "I cannot yield [my freedom] to any institution—and here I see danger, in anyone's having the Church dictate a stand. Art is a process of continuous growth, and any stipulated stand is outdated and obsolete almost before its utterance is complete." There is immense health in such a statement. The good artist must go ahead and do his work; to him the Church and the world are the same irrelevant thing, perhaps even the same enemy. Some others in Sondrup's book feel the same way. "The Mormon writer is most crippled," confesses novelist Herbert Harker. "His canvas is flat." "Either take that risk [of offending the Church hierarchy or of making artistic mistakes]," concludes Wayne Booth, "or do not expect to produce a great Mormon artistic culture." Karen Lynn puts it best: "It may be that the arts will achieve legitimacy [in the Church] if, and only if, the faith is seriously threatened."

What this second group of writers intends, in the long run, is to place the focus where it clearly belongs, on the artist himself/herself—not on inspiration (whatever *that* is) or on the arts in general (whatever *they* are) or on the Church (whatever it *thinks* it is) or on a specific art, but squarely on the artist. An institution like the Church does not necessarily produce great men; institutions, Emerson said, reversing the emphasis, are "the shadow of great men." First the artist and then everything else.

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, William Blake wrote: "A poet, a painter, a musician, an architect: the man or woman who is not one of these is not a Christian"—implying that when one is one of these, one is *already* a Christian. Grant Johannesen was probably the greatest pianist to come out of Mormonism. The fact that he was a great musician ought to have been sufficient for one to then say he was a great Mormon. I don't remember his ever saying anything about the connection between his phenomenal skill and his background, or remember his playing especially in the Church or "for the Church." He didn't have to. He was the best he could be—and that was very good indeed. Similarly, the Vardis Fisher of the Vridar Hunter tetralogy is probably the best fiction-writer to come out of Mormonism. He was, to extend Blake's daringly fine reasoning, very good at his art and therefore a good human being/Christian/Mormon—these are the same. Fisher did not have to talk about being "a Mormon writer," only to write well. The rest of the label became irrelevant, assumed, appropriate. And for one more example among many that could be given on this point. May Swenson is perhaps the best poet to come out of Mormonism. Her wonderful poetry says it all. I doubt that any of these accomplished artists waited for "inspiration" for their arts in any of the senses mentioned in Sondrup's book. They simply became their best as artists and so became *inspiring*—an important difference.

I like Sondrup's book best when someone like Wayne Booth stops talking about being a Mormon critic and simply goes ahead and is a very good critic—which he is. Or when an artist like Trevor Southey stops talking about his Mormon art and simply shows us some of his fine paintings—and they are fine. The art will speak for itself. But I dislike Sondrup's book a great deal when it says (and this is 90% of it) that a Mormon criticism of the arts will somehow generate Mormon arts.

## *Christ as Center*

*The Mortal Messiah, Book II*, by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1980, 413 pp. \$11.95

Reviewed by DANIEL B. MCKINLAY, who is presently enrolled in a Ph.D. program in New Testament Studies at the University of Virginia.

*The Mortal Messiah*, book two, is part of a multiple-volume work on Christ by Elder Bruce R. McConkie. This massive project is referred to by McConkie as "The Messianic Trilogy." The first work in this series is *The Promised Messiah*, which presents a detailed doctrinal discussion of the various aspects of Christ's mission as they were understood by the prophets before his mortal birth. The middle section is comprised of four books which cover the events and teachings of his earthly mission. The book under consideration here is the second volume in this part of the trilogy. The third division in the opus, as yet not published, will be titled *The Millennial Messiah*.

Book two of *The Mortal Messiah* includes the materials in Jesus' mission from the beginning of his Galilean ministry, with his initial call to repentance, to the conflict with the Pharisees about unwashed hands. The sequence of events is arranged according to a convenient scheme, rather than in a strictly accurate chronology, since, as McConkie explains, ". . . no one is able to make a harmony of the Gospels or list chronologically the events of Jesus' life. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John did not do it, and the accounts they have left us do not agree among themselves."

As an author, McConkie acts as our guide or host, and he speaks in the present tense, as if we are present when the various episodes of Jesus' life are unfolding. He often cites the words of Jesus as they are found in the Gospels, by using double quotation marks (" "), and then he follows with his own interpretive

paraphrase by using a single quotation mark ( ' '). The author's approach seems to be a blending of *kerygma* and *parenesis*, that is, the combining of a doctrinal proclamation of the *word* with an emphasis on the expectation of resultant righteousness. The exegesis of the author is based particularly within a Mormon frame of reference, although when they are thought to illuminate certain portions of the narrative, there are frequent blocks of quotations from A. Edersheim, F. W. Farrar and C. Geikie, conservative non-Mormon authors who wrote in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

McConkie accounts for the variations in the sayings of Jesus recorded by the evangelists in a given situation by saying that ". . . it is natural to assume that he repeated, summarized, paraphrased, and expanded his expressions as the needs of the moment required". (McConkie does make some allowances for slightly different versions of a single saying (for example, p. 318), but the differences only serve to give the reader a more complete understanding of the thought expressed). This proposition contrasts with the presuppositions of the form, source and redaction critics, who assume that the sayings of Jesus, which eventually found their way into the Gospels, went through an evolutionary process: The early Palestinian Church had some traditions about Jesus' *logia*; these in turn were repeated, modified, and embellished as the Church expanded according to the changed circumstances of each locale. By the time these sayings reached the evangelists, they had been crystallized in a set form. The evangelists took the sayings, adjusted them to conform to their own theological point-of-view, and in some cases "added" more sayings of Jesus. But the position recommended by McConkie, that the evangelists selected some of the *many* sayings of Jesus which represented either an accurate recital or one close to it, is in harmony with 3 Nephi 23:9-13, where the

risen Lord commands the Lehite disciples to keep a record of Samuel the Lamanite's prophecies and fulfilment. The whole ministry of Jesus in 3 Nephi attests the importance Jesus attaches to keeping records about him that are reasonably accurate. This is an area that invites further comparisons and research.

In the mind of this reviewer the sections which highlight the book are Jesus' messianic claims at Nazareth, the calling of the Twelve, the Sermon on the Mount and the "Bread of Life" sermon.

There are some assertions which (although briefly expressed) reflect some particularly interesting perspectives from a Mormon viewpoint. For example, in contemporary non-Mormon theology as well as other disciplines, symbols and their functions have received tremendous attention. When placed in the context of the religion of the Restoration, symbols take on profound significance as they relate to Christ and his mission. Thus McConkie, possibly deriving his authority from the Book of Mormon, points out that certain miracles performed by Moses, Elijah and Elisha were "types and shadows" of what the mortal Messiah would do. The physical healings performed by Jesus were a "type and pattern" of spiritual healings made through the atonement. And parables spoken by Jesus were "types and shadows" of spiritual truths. These and similar insights ought to impel us to greater reflection. The paramount importance of types, interspersed throughout the scriptures and inherent in the ordinances of the Priesthood, have proportionately been neglected by most of us. Perhaps McConkie's observations will inspire us to more seriously tap the wealth of symbolic implications in our theology. Hugh Nibley's final comments in his essay "the Expanding Gospel" (in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*) is also an encouraging gesture in that direction.

In his comments on the apostles, McConkie advances some peculiarly Mormon affirmations. For example, he says that the twelve men were fore-ordained to their ministry in the heavenly councils, and that in their association with Jesus they were given the keys to

regulate the affairs of the kingdom. These views correlate with revelatory data given to Joseph Smith, but in light of current biblical scholarship, they would be unintelligible without the clarified dimensions the restored gospel affords.

McConkie's book is not intensely scholarly nor technical, neither is it intended to be. As one of the "special witnesses" of the name of Christ in all the world (D&C 107:23), his aim is to reach as wide an audience as possible, in order to testify of Christ in plainness; therefore it is not his purpose to address many of the issues lodged in New Testament journals for the past several decades. One of these debated questions has dealt with Jesus' messianic consciousness, i.e., did Jesus really consider himself to be the Messiah, or did the Church, based on its experiences with the resurrected Christ, attribute the messianic office to him? In the same vein, some scholars, assuming that it is practically impossible to reconstruct the life of Christ from the Gospels, believing that they are not biographies but theologies about Christ, pose a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. The more radical scholars feel that the "historical Jesus" is irrelevant, and that the "gospel" as it is proclaimed from the pulpit is the real gem, so long as it is "demythologized" or divested of its supernatural aspects. Such scholars do not believe that faith in Christ must necessarily be tied down to historical events; faith can simply be translated and adapted into an existential scheme. But Mormons find the concreteness of contact with Christ through the scriptures to be crucially associated with their faith. History does not inhibit but enhances our sense of the sacred, as Truman Madsen points out in the introductory essay in *Reflections on Mormonism*. Thus the testimony that Jesus communed with prophets from time to time, and that he dwelt on the earth and was aware of his origin and identity is not disturbing for Mormons.

To this reviewer the most valuable contribution in Elder McConkie's series is the fact that he emphasizes the central role of Christ. Ill-wishers from the outside (usually of conservative bent) often

delight in claiming that Mormons are not really Christians despite our claims. This is due to the fact that in some points we radically depart from the "orthodox tradition." Actually, the layers of tradition and dogma caked onto the Christian churches through centuries of theologizing are not always identical with New Testament teachings. The "orthodox tradition" is laced with arbitrary teachings and decrees from Church Fathers, Church councils, theologians and Papal bulls.

Other friendlier outsiders sometimes misunderstand us when they hear us speak and teach in church, or read our literature. Because our religion embraces a broad spectrum of religious experience, Christ is seen as incidental, subservient to, or in a juxtaposition with other gospel features. Thus when we expend a lot of energy talking about apostles and prophets, the structure of the Church, missionary work, Priesthood, temple ordinances including eternal family relationships and some praiseworthy moral attributes such as courage and integrity, it is assumed that for us Christ takes a secondary position. This misunderstanding is unfortunate. In the judgment of this reviewer, the genius and beauty of the Restoration consists in the fact that it is Christocentric. The atonement of Christ

revolves everything else we hold dear in our religion.

The effort which Elder McConkie is making in his trilogy (and which he made in his previously published three-volume work, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*) reminds us that there are yet great frontiers to explore in the New Testament. Examples: Nephi claims to see a vision comparable to that of the apostle John (1 Nephi 14:24-25). It would be fruitful to compare the works of both authors who use similar phrases such as "Lamb of God" and "be lifted up." It has long been recognized that the Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus somewhat differently from John. Third Nephi has elements of both as well as some unique material yet it is a coherent whole. It would be worthwhile to demonstrate how 3 Nephi bridges the differences between the first three Gospels and the fourth. There is a great deal of exciting material on the Transfiguration, gathered largely by non-Mormons, that could be especially meaningful to Mormons. Similarly, much research has been done in the last three decades on the title "Son of Man." When combined with Old Testament, Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price and apocryphal references, the passages in the Gospels about this figure can carry fascinating emotional impact as well.

## *A Modern Evangelist*

*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary, Book I*, by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979, xix + 517 pp. Footnotes, index, \$12.95.

Reviewed by KEITH E. NORMAN, who holds a Ph.D. in Early Christian Studies from Duke University. He is the Gospel Doctrine teacher in his ward in Cleveland.

One is hopeful, upon reading Elder McConkie's preface to his latest volume on the dealings of Christ with mankind, that new ground may be broken for Mormons in the recognition of modern find-

ings and scholarship—the old ground, of course, being James Talmage's *Jesus the Christ*, which has enjoyed near-canonical status in Church circles. Talmage published his study in 1915, before the full impact of the so-called "Quest for the Historical Jesus," and the modern reader finds his style at times ponderous although rich, as well as many of his assumptions and data outdated. Nevertheless, he did a creditable job of incorporating nineteenth century conservative Protestant scholarship into the Mormon view of Christ.

McConkie begins by listing two principal reasons why a "true" life of Christ

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McConkie begins by listing two principal reasons why a "true" life of Christ

cannot be written by anyone: sufficient data do not exist, and “no mortal . . . can write the biography of a God” (pp. xv-xvi). Although his first point may seem to recognize the axiom of modern New Testament scholarship that the Gospels are more theological proclamations than attempts at biography in the modern sense, McConkie means only that the Spirit preserved that portion of Jesus’ words and deeds suitable to “the unbelieving and skeptical masses of men”. He admits that “recognized scholars” cannot agree upon a chronology of Jesus’ ministry or a harmony of the Gospels, but this, it seems, is due to their sectarian perversity rather than the actual limitations of the sources. Certainly there is no acknowledgement of any contradictions within or between the Gospel accounts by Elder McConkie. He begins by discarding “almost everything that worldly men” have written about Christ; his aim is to write a “near-biography” using “those slivers of knowledge” preserved about him, combined with latter-day revelation. This, he contends, goes beyond what Talmage attempted, and besides, “I think I hear his [Talmage’s] voice, . . . saying ‘Now is the time to build on the foundations I laid some seventy years ago, using the added knowledge that has come since by research and revelation, and to pen a companion volume to the one I was privileged to write.’”

But it is hard to detect here the use of much research or revelation written since 1915. The only post-Talmage works in the list of significant references are Joseph Fielding Smith’s 1938 compilation of the *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (it is not clear whether this should be considered new research or new revelation), the 1948 collection of official L.D.S. *Hymns* and McConkie’s own *Mormon Doctrine and Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. There are a few footnote allusions to J. Reuben Clark, Jr.’s *Our Lord of the Gospels*, but McConkie’s “scholarly” referents are all nineteenth century: principally Edersheim, Farrar and Geikie; i.e., the same ones upon which Talmage relied. In fact, there is only one instance in which he actually takes issue with Talmage: the date of the birth of Christ. Fol-

lowing Hyrum M. Smith (*Doctrine and Covenants Commentary*) and Clark, he does not subscribe to Talmage’s view that D&C 20:1 is a pronouncement that the Lord restored his church on April 6, 1830, as an 1830th birthday celebration. As Edersheim explained a century ago, since Herod the Great died in 4 B.C., Jesus had to be born before that date if the birth narratives of both Matthew and Luke are historically valid. Most likely, McConkie believes, Jesus was born in December of 5 B.C. This should reassure Mormons who have been uneasy about celebrating Christmas on the wrong day.

But this instance of deference to established historical data contra received Mormon beliefs is atypical, and relegated to a footnote. McConkie’s aim is rather to transcend what he perceives as the limitations of “faithless and uninspired” Biblical scholarship. For a critical reader caloused by the demands of historical objectivity, such an attitude would be cause enough to disregard the book. But the author, consistent with his calling as a “special witness of Christ,” claims exemption from these standards. As is the case with the original writers on the mortal Messiah, (see John 20:30-31) the modern apostle’s motivation is to lead souls “to love and follow” their Savior, rather than to analyze the data about him. The tone, consequently, is more that of a liturgical celebration than a “near-biography.” The rapturous sermonizing reminds one of the style of Augustine’s *Confessions*, although the literary quality may not be on that level. This is typified by McConkie’s own verse, which ornaments several sections of the book. The first of these begins,

I believe in Christ, he is my King,  
With all my heart to him I’ll  
sing; . . .

Most of the first sixteen chapters—almost 300 pages—is concerned with describing the religious and cultural setting into which Jesus was born. After a recapitulation of the prophecies commented upon in *The Promised Messiah*, McConkie’s first volume in this six-part project, we are given strings of quotes, often quite lengthy, from the revelant works of Edersheim. This represents

some of the best scholarship of the previous century, and there are those who will find these passages informative. They are by no means the least entertaining parts of the book. Although McConkie's selections sometimes seem arbitrary and tend to ramble, he has evidently spent a great deal of time poring over these massive early volumes; his own prose is sprinkled with such archaisms as "mayhap," "appertain," and "we cannot but suppose that . . ." The remaining 200 pages deal with "Jesus' Years of Preparation" and "Jesus' Early Judean Ministry," following the chronology used by J. Reuben Clark, Jr. The bulk of this is doctrinal commentary and expanded paraphrase rather than any serious attempt at exegesis, but this is the approach we have come to expect from the author's earlier writings. It is unfortunate, however, that except for an isolated Nibley, Mormon piety seems unable to cope with the methodological tools and insights of twentieth century-historical and literary scholarship.

Although we are not surprised at the neglect of most issues facing Biblical scholars, it is disappointing to see McConkie ignore questions of particular interest to his Mormon audience. Despite his repeated disavowal of speculation, he does not doubt that John the Baptist was himself baptized when he was precisely eight years of age, and that he was "married, had children", and, the author implies, faithfully kept church standards as we know them. But Jesus' marital status is never even raised as an issue, despite the stridency with which this doctrine was thumped from Mormon pulpits in past years.

As any good card-carrying Mormon knows, a person needs no special training to preach, and there are undoubtedly many who will savor this homiletic commentary on its own terms. Certainly there are many approaches to the Gospel narratives, and New Testament scholars have no monopoly on knowledge about Jesus. But it is not necessary to discount the importance of inspiration in the compo-

sition of the New Testament to recognize that the different writers had differing points of view. Paul's epistles were actually written closest to Jesus in time, yet Paul's attitude was that Christ is not known according to the flesh (II Cor. 5:16), and thus he was seemingly unconcerned with the historical details of Jesus' life. For him it is the risen Lord who speaks to the saints through his Spirit. John's Gospel seems to project the characteristics and sayings of the risen, eternal Lord back onto the mortal Jesus. But even the Synoptic writers arranged their narratives and selected and emphasized Jesus' acts and words according to their own theological and social purposes, drawing on traditions and remembrances thirty to fifty or more years after his ministry. They were more concerned with eternal truths about the Son of God than precise historical details of his mortal life. Thus a biblical fundamentalism, which presupposes objective historicity and unanimity in these sources, not only distorts their unique contributions but impoverishes our understanding of the Scriptures. McConkie's aim, to bring his readers to an encounter with the living Christ or enhance their relationship to his Spirit, is undeniably in harmony with the evangelists, but his methodology, attempting to reconstruct a "near-biography" on modern assumptions, merely serves to reinforce the prejudices of his readers that Jesus and his contemporaries really thought and acted as moderns, although disguised as first century Jews.

Three more volumes on *The Mortal Messiah* and a final installment entitled *The Millennial Messiah* are promised to complete the series. Those, who seek a more updated view of the study of Jesus might start with Hugh Anderson's volume in the *Great Lives Observed* series, entitled *Jesus* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1967). Written by a committed churchman, it is nonetheless dispassionate and knowledgeable, and will guide the interested reader to further sources of study.



## CONGRATULATIONS!

To the Winners of the *Dialogue*-Olympus  
"Mormon Women Speak" Contest:

First Prize (\$200.00) to  
Judith Rasmussen Dushku, for "Choice;"

Second Prize (\$100.00) to  
Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, for "Birthing;"

Third Prize (\$50.00) to  
Edna Laney, for "The Last Project;"

Honorable Mention (\$25.00)  
Karen Rosenbaum, For "For Now I See Through a Glass Door, Darkly;"

Honorable Mention (\$25.00)  
L. Marlene Payne, for "Notes from a Water-Worn Stone;"

Honorable Mention (\$25.00)  
Jerrie Hurd, for "The New Reliable Me."

These winning essays will appear in *Dialogue's* upcoming Women's Issue (Winter, 1981). Some twenty-odd additional essays have been selected to appear with the above winners in Olympus Publishing Company's upcoming book, *Mormon Women Speak*. Their authors have also been notified.

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