
BY COMMON CONSENT

Vol. 15, no. 1

January 2009

Editorial

As a New Year Begins

Lavina Fielding Anderson

One of the projects that coincides with the new year for me is re-reading the Book of Mormon, even though 2008 saw yet another selective traipsing through that volume of scripture in Sunday School classes. Such re-readings have been an annual event for me since about 1985 when President Ezra Taft Benson challenged all Church members to read from the Book of Mormon every day all year long regardless of whatever standard work was the course of study that particular year.

Since President Benson, from the 1950s on, was frequently clawing the bottom of the barrel in my personal "least-favorite General Authority" list and his standing did not materially improve as he edged up in seniority until he was finally Church president, I should explain that I took this action--not because I like President Benson or because I agreed with very much of what he said. Rather, *because* I disagreed with most of what he said, I felt it incumbent on me to consider what he said very carefully and reflect on it seriously. Furthermore, I take the Book of Mormon seriously as scripture and think that anyone who self-identifies with the term "Mormon" should have a close acquaintance, not only with the contro-

versies around the book and its coming forth but also with its contents. And that acquaintance should be a personal, reflective, and, at least in my case, prayerful one.

Two passages in the Book of Mormon have long been favorites of mine, and I expect them to remain such, even while I expect new passages to acquire new meaning during this year's reading. One is Nephi's testimony: "The Lord . . . inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile" (2 Ne. 26:33).

As the debris of California's post-Proposition 8 continues to clog the air, this passage has particular resonance. The Church managed to ignore the "black" half of "black and white" from the death of Joseph Smith in 1844 until Spencer W. Kimball's compassion and will sought and found a new answer in 1978. The Church has had no trouble whatsoever ignoring the "female" part of "male and female" since 1830 and there is no indication that any prophet has struggled in prayer with what that passage might mean.

Is it stretching the sense of the passage to consider that another set of paired terms--"gay and straight"--also belongs in this cata-

logue of those who "are alike unto God"? I have no trouble reading them into that passage, and it makes my grief more intense at the spectacle of the Church taking deliberate, emotionally divisive, politically costly action to exclude. It seems particularly hypocritical for the Church to base its stand on a "family values" claim when it is depriving a significant portion of the U.S. population of the ability to form families with the same ease as the rest of the population.

It is a small comfort, at least, that the Church is no longer making the mind-boggling claim that it is holding gay members to the same standard as that applied to heterosexual members--of premarital chastity and post-marital fidelity--while it simultaneously moves heaven and earth to prevent gay marriages. Hearing Elder Dallin H. Oaks make that argument with a straight face a few years ago seriously eroded my hope that he would contribute a clear and well-trained mind to the thinking of the Quorum.

The second Book of Mormon passage that has long been a favorite occurs a few chapters earlier in the same book: "O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there" (2 Ne. 9:41). Although many excessive things were said in the heated political environment of Proposition 8, I became increasingly concerned at how easily and how frequently supporters of Proposition 8 defaulted to the position that Church leaders had articulated a position on this issue (quite true), that therefore "the prophet" had spoken (not true, though probably a not unreasonable extension), and that therefore God had spoken.

I know that Church members are actively

encouraged to do this mental algebra: $A = B$, $B = C$, therefore, $A = C$. No doubt many LDS supporters of Proposition 8 did pray and receive a personal response that was satisfactory to them. However, it has been a long time since I've heard an over-the-pulpit assertion that members must ask for and receive individual confirmation of a principle, policy, person, or proposition--that *this* is part of the principle of continuous revelation, along with free agency, that is the glory of Mormonism. Instead, what I hear is the assertion that the Holy Ghost will always confirm the "truths" spoken by Church leaders. This assertion raises the logical question: if the answer is always yes and never no, then why is the question necessary? The only element necessary for determining that something is "true" is to know the ecclesiastical title of the man (it's nearly always a man) enunciating it.

In that context, Nephi's reminder that the Holy One of Israel "employeth no servant" at the gate which lies at the end of the "straight course" is immensely comforting. It is also immensely challenging. And as 2009 begins, a difficult year by any form of prediction, it might be well for us to refresh our memory with the salutary reminder that our Lord "inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him."

A MORAL VICTORY FOR AMERICA

Fred A. North

Note: Although the Mormon Alliance by policy does not comment on political candidates (while reserving the right to take a position on issues), this heartfelt expression of joy from a long-time subscriber seemed to be in a category of its own, especially given Mormonism's policy, still vivid in living memory, of racial discrimination.

In our recent national election America won a supreme moral victory. One so grand as to transcend all political boundaries, even beyond race itself. The results were so impacting that millions of us wept tears of pure joy. Humanity around the globe took notice and gave us a salute.

The issue was far more than which person can best lead or which is the more correct political platform with which to deal with the challenges of the moment either at home or abroad. Both men contending for the presidency are fine and decent men. Upon winning each would do the very best he could. That is exactly what each of us would do.

As for our two-party political system we are surely not comparing good with evil, although our betrayal of the First Amendment to our Constitution is exactly what many have done. Conservatism and liberalism are merely the two wings on the same bird. For Platonic harmony and equilibrium these must combine both in the individual and in a culture. Without roots, the center will not hold. We fall apart. Without wings for growth, change, and advancement we stagnate and the world passes us by. We have already seen too much of this in our Church.

So what was going on the Tuesday night of all those tears of joy?

Each of us was shown, if we were not spiritually dead, a brief shining moment of a Camelot that could be, should be, and with God's help will be. A loving united human family, each of us a genuine child of God. Is not the sight of these Princeton and Harvard Law School graduates moving into the White House with their two beautiful small girls a grander vision than to see them walking into a field as slaves to pick cotton for some Christian-family-values, Sunday-School-attending predatory capitalist?

So why has it taken us so long to get there?

It is a human tragedy of the deepest dye that organized religion has so often been used throughout history as a weapon of hate and dehumanization. Yes, indeed, that Tuesday night was special. In the history of America, were there ever before so many joyful hearts than those we saw in Grant Park in Chicago, all over America, and jubilation throughout the world?

Perhaps as a nation we will continue to grow up, mature morally, and even be willing to allow a Jew, a Mormon, and a woman to preside in the Oval office.

A Use for Friends

When things are heard
that were not heard before
and we're in doubt about
things that up to now were true--
at least we thought they were--
It's like a new, strange land
where perils and promises
are unpredictable,
where there are not charts
and much is frightening
and yet to be discovered as it is.
We need companions more
than in the days when all was certain.

--J. Donald Johnston

Doing Celestial Math

Rustin Kaufman

I stopped a young LDS coed on campus who was wearing a "Shoot for Terrestrial" badge and asked her to explain it. She said that she had learned from reading Mark Twain's posthumously published *Letters from the Earth* that some Pacific Islanders reveled

in a celebration during which many young men got to make love to the princess.

I thought, when she said this, that there was an inkling of this theme in *Night of the Iguana* (the film version of Tennessee Williams's play by the same title), where Ava Gardner took on some island boys, although she neglected to explain her no doubt edifying theological motivations for doing so. Polyandry (multiple husbands) is likewise practiced in Tibet because people there are so poor, it takes more than one man to support a woman.

"Think about it," said the coed. "If there are only a few men in the celestial kingdom, and many wives, where are all the rest of the 'honorable' men? They're in the terrestrial kingdom, of course. And I'm looking forward to a terrestrial existence, where I can enjoy the attentions of many men."

I reflected that what she said made some sense. Houses of ill-repute aren't places where women come to meet men. No, they are places where a woman takes on several men in an evening. If the situation were reversed, the men would have a difficult time "performing," over and over and over.

I asked the girl, "Will progeny result from such a terrestrial arrangement?"

"Certainly not!" She quoted scripture on this point, and then spelled out the exegesis: "Why would I want to be up there with the celestial kingdom plural wives, who are forever pregnant or lactating? And after all the unpleasantness, do they ever get any credit? Did our own Heavenly Mother ever get any credit for creating us earthlings? No way! The men always get all the credit. So my terrestrial plan is the best thing in the hereafter for women. Girls just wanna have fun!"

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Wish List

Note: This wish list was submitted anonymously by a long-time subscriber. "By Common Consent" welcomes other wish lists from the pews.

1. I'd like to see the Three Nephites quit wandering around, settle down, join the Church and start attending meetings. I wouldn't mind hearing them speak in general conference about what they've been doing for the past several hundred years.

2. I'd like to see what would happen if Mormon doctors started treating bruises with tobacco and if vets started treating all sick cattle with same (D&C 89:8).

3. I'd like to expedite work for the dead by cutting the sessions to thirty minutes and letting each participant do twenty-five names per session.

4. I'd like to add questions concerning overweight, cholesterol levels, and gossip to the temple recommend interview.

5. I'd like to suggest that whenever 60 percent of the high priests quorum falls asleep, the quorum leader will stand and hold up a sign declaring a ten-minute "quiet time" so they can slumber undisturbed.

6. I'd require all speakers who mumble or cry in front of a microphone to hand out printed copies of what they're trying to say.

7. When five or more babies are fussing at the same time, I would require that the congregation stand and sing a patriotic song.

8. Class members should be allowed equal time to stand and explain why they don't believe everything that some other class member has just said.

9. When a Sunday School class member says: "I know that's what the Bible (Book of Mormon/prophet, etc.) says, but that's not what it (he) means," he or she should be required to write on the blackboard 100 times:

"I'm not sure I know what anything means."

10. Any class member who terminates a discussion by saying, "We should not delve into the mysteries" should be required to write on the blackboard 100 times: "This subject is a mystery only to me."

THE HEEHOO LIST

He who angers you controls you.

He who asks is a fool for five minutes, but he who does not ask remains a fool forever. (Chinese proverb)

He who blames others has a long way to go on his journey. He who blames himself is half-way there. He who blames no one has arrived. (Chinese proverb)

He who breaks a thing to find out what it is, has left the path of wisdom. (J.R.R. Tolkien)

He who builds to every man's advice will have a crooked house. (Danish proverb)

He who buys what he does not need steals from himself.

He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead; his eyes are closed. (Albert Einstein)

He who cannot forgive breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass. (George Herbert)

He who can take no interest in what is small, will take false interest in what is great.

He who dies with the most toys, is, nonetheless, still dead.

He who fails to prepare, prepares to fail.

He who has a thing to sell and goes and whispers in a well is not as apt to get the dollars as he who climbs a tree and hollers.

He who has no Christmas in his heart will never find Christmas under a tree.

He who hesitates is not only lost, but miles from the next exit.

He who is not grateful for the good things he has would not be happy with what he wishes he had.

He who kneels before God can stand before anyone. (Dwight L. Moody)

He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool. Shun him. He who knows not and knows that he knows not is a child. Teach him. He who knows and knows not that he knows is asleep. Wake him. He who knows and knows that he knows is a wise man. Follow him. (Arab Proverb)

He who knows others is learned. He who knows himself is wise. (Lao Tse 604-531 BC)

He who receives a good turn should never forget it; he who does one should never remember it.

He who sees the calamity of other people finds his own calamity light. (Arabian Proverb)

He who slings mud loses ground.

He who stands for nothing, falls for anything.

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ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was incorporated on July 4, 1992. Its purposes are to identify and document ecclesiastical/spiritual abuse, to promote healing and closure for its survivors, to build more sensitive leadership, to empower LDS members to participate with more authenticity in Mormonism, and to foster a healthier religious community.

By Common Consent is the quarterly newsletter of the Mormon Alliance. Comments, articles, and items for inclusion are welcome, if they are submitted thirty days before the mailing deadlines, which are the last weeks of December, March, July, and September. Please send all correspondence about articles and subscriptions to Mormon Alliance, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115. Subscriptions are \$30 for each calendar year.

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The worst thing we can do with a dilemma is to resolve it prematurely because we haven't the courage to live with uncertainty. William Sloane Coffin

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