

# Readers' Forum

In the May-June issue, Sunstone published the comments of LDS students attending divinity schools. Here is the experience of a non-Mormon who joined the Church after becoming acquainted with it through her work as a professor of religion at a college in the east.

## Professor of Religious Studies

Religion, I learned from Carl Jung, is "the careful and scrupulous observation of the numinous." The remainder of what I learned in seminary and graduate school in religious studies had everything to do with discovering the numinous, learning how it might be observed and where. The numinous! That sense of the Holy. Not holy things, as in holy water, or holy men, but that which causes one to wonder, to be amazed. That which fascinates and sometimes terrifies, which is of both the Self and of the Other. That which constitutes the depth dimension which moves in tremors under all of our existence waiting as the inner earth waits to quake one day when we have stopped expecting it. Symbolic form, poetry, not stale dogmatism, that was religion.

Having learned to see religions, as Heidegger would have it, with a dancing eye, I knew I could never again substitute sermons, mausoleum style, for spontaneous utterance of the spirit; knew I would never be happy with petrified form and closed canon when the possibility of continuing revelation was held before me.

My graduate studies in religion taught me to see religions—all of them—as symbolic form, emanating from the aesthetic realm and structured through the creating (mythopoetic) function of the human soul. Religion belonged not with logical positivism but with poetry, not with the critic but with the story teller, not with analysis but with creation.

That awareness of the vitality of religions I consider to be the greatest gift I received from the "academic" study of religions. What had been dead became alive and offered unlimited possibility for ever new and diverse forms of living. It was only much later after I had studied most of the world's religions through this re-vision that I began to

make any discrimination between these various symbol systems. It became irrevocably clear to me that each religious system bore the capability of enlivening its adherents with the vitality of spirit. Nevertheless, some seemed to have a "larger vision." Some were more able to "ambush the marvelous" than were others. Something happened to me as a result of this awareness and I began to gather from the various religious and cultural symbol systems those forms which some intuitive spirit whispered to me were "right," fitting.

I suppose I constructed my own religion internally and dropped in and out of several of the available external forms. It was only many years later when, (in the bicentennial year) I received a grant to study women of Mormonism that I discovered that there was, indeed, a living religion which held together in one place all those various doctrines and practices that I thought I had gathered from all the parts of the earth to form a unique whole suited only to myself. It was with a consuming disbelief that I began to devour books of LDS doctrine and history. I experienced a kind of intellectual horror that years of seminary and graduate work in the academic study of religions had left me in such abysmal ignorance in this one area. It was not that I felt I had been given comprehensive knowledge of all things religious but I had, until then, felt supremely competent in my field. I was confronted with the obviousness of omission: eleven years of graduate study had produced the knowledge that Mormons came from upstate New York, followed Brigham Young westward (I couldn't even recall having heard whatever happened to Joseph Smith) and had once practised polygamy. I also knew that they were a strange group of people who resembled the Campbellites and probably were the product of the burnt-over district evangelization. Thinking that perhaps I had been the one who missed something and that, in actuality, my graduate school education and seminary training had not neglected this material but that I had simply been obtuse, I inquired of my friends, particularly those specializing in American Religions, whether they had any special information on LDS doctrine which I did not have. I found them in the same state of ignorance.

Most viewed Mormonism culturally as a small repressive sect from Utah. When I reported to one college president friend how much fun I was having with LDS theology he retorted, "I didn't know they had any." To this instant I continue to be intellectually embarrassed at the years of reading in LDS thought and history I have to recover. The number of books I have yet to open is appalling and, as I recall, it was only a year ago that I walked into the Church Historian's office and said, "What can I do? I am stunned. Here I am at age 40 with seminary education, a master's degree and a PhD in religious studies and I don't know anything!"

I'm not sure how a person catches up or if that's possible even. I loved my graduate work in religious studies. It made religion alive and full of promise. But we were then all busy trying to detach ourselves from the ideas of "churchianity" and somehow I guess overlooked the fact that our symbolic reality had finally to be concretized in a living religious form. Unlike my LDS friends who came from a concrete religious practice and moved on to seminaries and graduate schools in search of new and broader meanings, I learned the symbolic meanings and multitudinous interpretations in the absence of any concrete (practical) experience. I am grateful now for having found that element of experience in religions which gives tangible evidence and confirmation to the symbolic reality. I suppose that speaking theologically one would have to say that my LDS experience provided being for Being without which that necessary but boundless abstraction would have remained speculative and apart from human experience.

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**Editor's Note:** In August it will have been four years since the founding of *Sunstone*. For most of that time it has been my privilege to serve as publisher and editor, with the assistance of many dedicated members of the Board of Directors, associate editors, and subscribers. Effective August 1, I relinquish my *Sunstone* responsibilities to the Board, coordinated by Peggy Fletcher, in order to devote more time to my neglected family, career, and graduate studies. To all whose support has made *Sunstone* possible, I express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation.

Scott Kenney

## Male-minded Marriages

Is this where I came in? It haunts me as I lie in bed at nights reflecting on what I see going on before me instead of going to sleep. Just twelve years ago I was an aspiring graduate student who left the valleys of the mountains and went out to slay the dragon of professional excellence. I remember those anxieties as I met my fellow grad students and encountered some awesome professors. After two years of preparation I still feared that I might not make it through the general examination. Once that huge obstacle had been conquered, my feelings of inadequacy did not disappear. Producing a doctoral dissertation could either be a minimal routine or it could be the springboard into major contributions. The latter was obviously the more challenging and the only respectable alternative. Midway through it I realized that this was becoming a life-style. One challenge when mastered only led to the next. So it was. The dissertation led to a job. Comparison with colleagues was constant. Achieving tenure was not enough, for beyond it all was the issue of major contribution. These steps from graduate school to dissertation to hiring to tenure were merely enabling benchmarks to encourage major scholarly contribution. No matter where I looked there were colleagues ahead of me. There still are because quality doesn't follow the calendar. Seniority and contribution may not be linked at all.

Add to insecurity a high achievement need which so many aspiring young men have and then wed it with a patriarchal concept of marriage and one gets a marriage relationship that can be unhealthy. The young man feels under pressure to excel. Without conscious intention the young married man may just assume that his professional preparation must take priority over other issues in the marriage. Nights often have to be devoted to study. Years often have to be spent in severe economic austerity. The wife is expected to fill the role of dutiful supporter. Her normal complaints are accepted but the man sometimes feels that she just doesn't understand how tough it is to produce excellence.

Add to all of this the LDS Church atmosphere. The young man at graduate school is often called to ecclesiastical responsibility. He sits on the stand while mommy wrestles with three little ones in the back benches. The same scenario repeated: her understandable complaints are heard but the young man has a dedication to "build the Kingdom." The pioneer

model of mother is expected—selfless sacrifice.

To many observers in the ward everything looks fine. Worthy and dedicated and talented young men wed to sacrificing, educated, talented women who bear lovely children and live in student housing for four years of voluntary poverty. With many couples everything is actually all right but with some it is not. Yet both kinds are facing the same problems and some grow together and others grow apart. Why? My one-sided experience says it is in the men's hands. Women are having to cut a new trail. This is the generation where many are highly educated and have to figure out where they stand on women's liberation. But it is the men who make the difference, I think. Some of us who are insecure just can't admit it. We clam up. We don't like to be challenged. We enter marriage with some mind-sets about masculinity. We have to control the money. If not that, we have to appear successful or a bit aggressive to fit the masculine stereotype. Above all we have to achieve and be admired by our peers. We treat our spouse as a peer. We desperately want her admiration but the type we expect is the type we get when we preside rather than the type that comes from selflessness. We assume that we will have to make the major decisions about profession. As a result we will also have to make the decisions about time allocation. So naturally profession gets the first priority and not too seldom the Church is equally important. To us that doesn't mean that the family is third priority because obviously the first two are for the benefit of the family. Surely she understands that!

But she doesn't. And she feels guilty for being ambivalent. Sometimes she can't even admit it. Either consciously or unconsciously she comes to the gradual conclusion that her mate is selfish. He tells himself that it is because of the unassailable need to prepare for high quality profession or the need to fulfill dedication to the Lord. But the practical daily result may be selfishness. It may be escape from routine, escape from child rearing, escape from listening. It may be instead the pursuit of the limelight.

How then do some couples get through the same austerity uninjured—maybe even fortified? Again my own guilt feelings say it is in the hands of the man. My old fashionedness says that Mormon women (and probably many others) want the men to preside. They want to support a worthy, selfless, gentle man. They are sacrifice-prone.

But there is a difference between sacrifice and being submerged. Sacrifice is voluntary. Being submerged results from being manipulated. The successful couples I see upon my return to student housing are led by a man who is not threatened by an achieving wife. These men are willing to see it as a compliment when their wife sits on the stand and they are in the foyer with crying kids. They are believers in one aspect of women's liberation—that their spouses deserve to achieve human self-fulfillment just as much as they do. And it isn't the husband's achievement first and the wife's second. Four years of dedication to the husband's professional training will not be followed by years of ease when the wife can blossom. The wife's personality must be given the chance for individual growth now or never. If a pattern of submergence is established now it will be even more justifiable later. She will then either loose her belief in her potential or she will rebel. Graduate school has nothing to do with it.

The measure of a man's greatness is what his children and his spouse think of him. Wives and children can only admire able men if they temper their ambition with selflessness. That consumes time—lots of it. And that time will diminish the scholarship, or the business or the Church efforts. But the honing it achieves on the insecure male mentality will nudge the man towards a wholeness. And the wholeness of his mate, if allowed to develop, will similarly help him to wisdom. This wisdom will reveal that the endless hours in the pursuit of excellence are sometimes an attempt to mask insecurity as much as they are the drive to make a contribution. Don't give up the goal of excellence. Certainly the spin-off of selflessness and devotion to one's mate should not be mediocrity in profession or Church. But call a spade a spade. If fourteen hour work days are an escape to mask insecurity, attack the problem and not the symptom.

After having waded through all this personally for a dozen years I don't know if I can communicate it to students I love. But I can sleep now having said it.

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