Mormon Media Image

Recently the Mormon church has been the subject of numerous articles in the national press, some positive and some negative. The following are summaries or excerpts from such articles. We at SUNSTONE *do not endorse the opinions expressed nor do we vouch for the accuracy of the original reporting. But we include this section because we think it is important for our readers to know what is being said.*

More on "The Mormon Nation"

Peter Bart, author of *Thy Kingdom Come*, continues to enjoy a nationwide audience for his opinions regarding "The Mormon Nation." In a recent article published by *The Denver Post*, the novelist's authoritative pronouncements on the LDS church's financial holdings, political influence, and capacity for "social engineering" were reported by *Post* religion editor, Virginia Culver.

"There are raised eyebrows and clicking of the tongues" in the hierarchy over the resurgence of polygamy in the Church; however "The leaders aren't really trying to curb the practice," Bart told Culver. Members who return to such fundamentalism "are the core of the church. The church doesn't give a damn if it loses a liberal, but it hates to lose its core members," he claimed.

According to Bart, plural marriage was originally based on the LDS belief that only married persons will get to heaven "and basic feelings of lust among Mormon men and a feeling among Mormon women that sex is disgusting and vulgar."

Culver noted that Bart "grudgingly admires the church" for "accomplishing the greatest task of social engineering" he has ever seen. "Early Mormon Women were feminists and leaders," said the author, "but in the course of a generation (following the end of polygamy) the church managed to change those prototypical women's libbers to Victorian housewives, and the women buy it."

Bart said he believes LDS leaders anticipate the Church taking over the country. "They feel it is their destiny, that it's an irreversible course. They feel that the country will be ceded to them, as the chosen people. That thought motivates their political influence and the influence they have in every area." "The Kingdom of Zion," continued Bart, "shows a peculiar serenity and calmness. They seem to know they're right, so there's nothing to be nervous about."

Linked to this is what Bart described as the "astonishing. . . lack of dissent among church members. There's a saying that if you got 10 Jews in a room you'd have 40 different opinions. Well, if you get 10 Mormons in a room you'll have one opinion. . . . Dissenters are either pushed out or ignored.

The novelist said he was also impressed by the Church's "unbelieveable power" and wealth. "I sensed that they could make or break a person's career." He believes that the Church's holdings rank among the top 50 companies i n the country with an annual gross income of more than two billion dollars. Bart, formerly with the *Wall Street Journal*, compared interviewing Mormon leaders with interviewing business men. "The leaders are industrialists, though they invoke God's name a lot. It's difficult to deal with the hierarchs who really believe they talk to God every day."

Considering Bart's views on the Mormon community, it is not difficult to understand why the main plot of *Thy Kingdom Come* centers on the aims of the First Counselor in the First Presidency to "lead the church in a non-violent takeover of the United States through proselytizing and business acumen." (A sub-plot concerns a polygamist cult trying to return the Church to its original fundamentalism.)

Bart told Culver that he decided to write the book after "becoming fascinated with the mystery and growth of the church 'and how it has managed to keep such a low profile. It seemed like a terrific setting for a novel.' "

Bart also falsely claimed that his is the first novel written about Mormons in 41 years, yet it has "quietly disappeared from all church-owned bookstores. The *Deseret News*. . . reviewed the book with the attitude of 'how dare an outsider write about us.' " Culver said Bart's book was "written much like a historical novel, accurate in historical and other facts concerning the church, but with characters and plots based on the author's imagination."

Elsewhere in the country, *Thy Kingdom Come* has received mildly favorable reviews. Oakley Hill, in the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner's* "Book Week," wrote:

> Saints may find the novel offensive, while apostates regard its revelations as shopworn and tame. To a Gentile the information on Mormon history and the state of the Church is fascinating. He is only mystified by the basic fact of the Mormon *faith*. What is the power of this improbable system of worship that makes it, with Islam, one of the two great religions still expanding worldwide? The novel never comes to grips with this first cause. It is simply a given that must be accepted.
>
> Whether this given is accepted or not, the novel is a compelling one, packed with suspense contrived to keep the reader's nose in the book. If the authors of this kind of novel need to be as much generals marshaling their information, as writers, Peter Bart has here won his chicken colonelcy, if not his first star.

According to a review in the July, 1981 *Library Journal*, the characters in Bart's book "are mostly true to life and convincing. They wrestle with well-publicized issues ranging from the status of women to polygamous cults. A few adolescent and breezy sex episodes lighted the burden as skeleton after skeleton is hauled out of the closet. The author is an ex-journalist whose writing is compelling and impassioned. This gloves-off recreation will spark readers pique and interest."

Publisher's Weekly called *Thy Kingdom Come* "well-researched, timely, and frightening." Its "tale of people, power, and corruption is sometimes exciting, sometimes overdone, but for the most part is an absorbing yarn." Somewhat less impressed was Cornelia Emerson, whose review appeared in the book section of the *Los Angeles Times*. "Shades of plots and paranoia," wrote Emerson. "*Thy Kingdom Come*. . . should be cause for rejoicing among conspiracy fans—giving them something new to worry about. Members of the Mormon Church are working to inherit the earth . . . . *Thy Kingdom Come* is a contemporary conspiracy story, absorbing and readable, that succeeds by exploiting fears about a subculture in our midst. In the end, the title reads like a prophecy—of a kingdom still to come!"