

# Readers' Forum

## On Faith, Scholarship, and Wordprints

The Genesis Project, a recent computer study of Bible "wordprints" at Israel's Technion University, concluded that the book of Genesis was most probably written by one person. This language study, which supports the traditional authorship of Moses, recalls the timely SUNSTONE article, "Book of Mormon Wordprints Reexamined" (6:2, March-April 1981).

Curiously, the Genesis Project in Israel and the Book of Mormon wordprints at BYU both conclude in favor of a fundamentalist view of scriptural authorship, but do so by opposite findings as to multiplicity of authorship. The BYU study claims to have found statistical differences in language use which suggest numerous ancient authors rather than one contemporary author, such as Joseph Smith. The Genesis Project claims statistical unity of different passages in the original Hebrew, suggesting one author, a conclusion more difficult to assert. Differences can be defined at certain confidence levels, but sameness can only be expressed as an absence of detectable differences between samples.

The conclusion that one author penned the book of Genesis contradicts a century of widely accepted biblical research, which employed the methods of literary, form and tradition criticism that grew out of Wellhausen's Documentary Theory of Old Testament source writings, articulated in 1876. Textual contradictions, varying vocabularies and writing styles, and duplicate stories have led biblical exegetes to distinguish four basic literary sources in the Pentateuch: Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly writer, and Deuteronomist. (See *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 1968, for elaboration of these ideas.)

For instance, two creation stories are distinguished in Genesis. The first (Gen. 1:1—2:4a), attributed to the Priestly writer, presents a chronology of seven days wherein God creates heaven and earth, the oceans, land, vegetation, lights for the earth (the

sun, moon, and stars), animals, and lastly, man (male and female). The Yahwist creation story which follows (Gen. 2:4b—25) differs significantly. The "Lord God" (Yahweh) creates the heavens and earth, next man (male only) out of the dust of the earth, then animals, and lastly woman constructed from man's rib. Included in the second story is the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge, a forbidden fruit, and the Serpent.

These two creation stories illustrate how different language, imagery, and styles are combined within a single book. Mormon exegete Scott G. Kenney has demonstrated further evidence of multiple authorship in his examination of overlapping flood narratives in Genesis: "Mormons, Genesis & Higher Criticism" (SUNSTONE 3:1, Nov.-Dec. 1977). The discernment of multiple authors in the Old Testament has resolved many questions of textual duplication and variation.

Is a century of biblical scholarship and consensus destined to be nullified by a statistical processing of word usage? If the BYU wordprints studies are any indication, the computer findings might not be accepted too quickly. When the BYU studies first came out, press reports cited "overwhelming evidence" of multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon (*Church News*, Feb. 16, 1980, p. 14).

Then, one year ago in these pages, Professor D. James Croft (Management Science, University of Utah, now a director of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board in Washington, D.C.) demonstrated that the conclusion positing twenty-four Book of Mormon authors was unwarranted, both by method and by evidence. He argued that (1) first of all, stable "wordprints" (frequency of common word use by author) may not exist over time, subject matter, or literary form—questions about wordprint validity also apply to the Genesis Project; (2) highly edited works such as the Book of Mormon may contain altered frequencies of

noncontextual words—also applies to Genesis Project; (3) the BYU study has design problems, such as lack of paired comparisons between Book of Mormon passages and writings of individual nineteenth century authors (including Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon) and a lack of baseline tests to show that wordprints are stable within the writings of single authors; and (4) the study improperly implies more statistical differences among Book of Mormon authors than even the flawed data and test results warrant.

"Wordprint" authors Wayne A. Larson and Alvin C. Rencher of the BYU Department of Statistics, responding to Professor Croft in the same issue of SUNSTONE, acknowledge "some mistakes" in their original article (*BYU Studies* 20, Spring 1980) but said that their major conclusions were still valid. They cite results "inadvertently left out" and "not reported in detail" which do support the existence of many different wordprint styles.

It is interesting to note that prior to Professor Croft's response, some BYU faculty close to the wordprint project tried to persuade Croft not to go public with his critique and eschewed open interchange and discussion of faith-promoting subjects. The risk that objective analysis might not support one's interpretation of faith does not seem to warrant presuming a desired but unsupported conclusion from that analysis. Hopefully, commitment to a faith would be encouraged by more rather than less understanding of that faith.

The search for Book of Mormon wordprints continues. Physics professor John L. Hilton (University of California, Berkeley), by his own acknowledgement a faithful Latter-day Saint, is attempting to construct a valid research design that would fairly test the multiplicity of Book of Mormon authorship. He is in touch with the BYU people, whose difficulties he hopes to avoid, and he has invited Professor Croft's advice. He has also made contact with the Genesis Project in Israel. Professor Hilton has set up controls to insulate the study from his pro-LDS bias; he expects to publish definitive results when complete.

If the Book of Mormon is an ancient book, the writing patterns of different authors, rather than the style of the translator, should be discernible. Section 9 of the Doctrine and Covenants describes how Joseph Smith kept working on the translation until it was "right." Lacking verifiable

source documents and archeological confirmation, the Book of Mormon could use the support of successful wordprint studies. As of now, the existence of twenty-four Book of Mormon authors remains a matter of faith.

Not yet available in English, the Israeli wordprint analysis of Genesis awaits critical evaluation. Based upon the initial results of the BYU analysis, perhaps we should be cautious in our expectations.

George D. Smith  
San Francisco, California

### An Avalanche of Evidence

Without wishing to get embroiled in an endless dispute, I would like to respond to some comments made by George D. Smith, Jr. (SUNSTONE 6:4) which were apparently prompted by my letter in the previous issue of your magazine.

While the subject of Roberts's work on Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon can rightly be thought of as a subject deserving the attention of Mormon historians, it can in no way be considered a subject worthy of discussion when considering the authenticity of the Book of Mormon; for competent historians of the ancient world learned long ago that playing the game of "parallelomania" in an attempt to impugn the authenticity of an alleged ancient document just won't cut it. (Methodological examples of this realization can be found in Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* [Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966], pp. 22-34, 143-146, 153-158; Harrison, in Harrison, Waltke, Guthrie, and Fee, *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary, and Textual* [Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Mich., 1978], pp. 4-5; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* [i-xiii], Anchor Bible Series [New York, 1966], pp. LVII-LVIII; Marshall, *The Historical Criticism of Documents* [London, 1920]; cf. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* [Deseret Book, 1976 edition], pp. 5-6; Jakeman, "Which Is the Way?" *Newsletter and Proceedings of the Society for Early Historic Archaeology*, No. 117 [December 1969], pp. 1-6.) Indeed, if one were to prefer "parallelomania" when testing the Bible, he could "disprove" the authenticity of the "Book of Books" (or so he might think) in five minutes! (See, for example, the "success" of such methods as discussed in *Jerald and Sandra Tanner's Distorted View of Mormonism*, by a Latter-day Saint Historian [Salt Lake City, 1977], pp. 49-55.)

The critics of the Book of Mormon always come into the game assuming that the record is a man-made product of the nineteenth century. They then go looking for books written during that period of time which discuss the American Indians and their ancestors. Upon finding ten to twenty parallels between such sources and the Book of Mormon (I've never seen anyone come up with more than thirty!), they assume that the game is over and that the antiquity of the Book of Mormon has been disproven once and for all. What the critics don't seem to realize, or just choose to ignore, is that as long as they insist on testing the Book of Mormon by such a method they will never really be in the game. *The only way to prove the Book of Mormon false is to find contradictions with the milieu of the ancient world from which it claims to have arisen.*

The real issue isn't what parallels can be found between the Book of Mormon and nineteenth century sources on the American Indians and their ancestors (none of which deal significantly or at length with pre-400 A.D. Mesoamerican culture); rather, it is whether or not the Book of Mormon fits into the ancient background claimed for it. Perhaps one day the Book of Mormon will be subjected to the serious and honest historical test it has been crying for since the day it came from Cumorah.

Michael T. Griffith  
Rexburg, Idaho

### Premen Speculation Unsatisfying

Dr. Robert C. Fletcher's "Attempt at Reconciliation—Are Creation and Evolution Compatible?" (Vol. 7, No. 1) contained valuable comments about the perceived conflict of Science and Religion and an interesting, even somewhat plausible explanation of the origin of man which seems to account for the Image of God Problem as well as the Atonement Problem. However, his scenario left as many conflicts intact as it reconciled, especially for the Mormon scholar.

While the Sectarian view of man's creation may have been harmonized with the "observations of the paleo-anthropologists," by limiting his treatment to "the story of the creation of man in the Old Testament" Dr. Fletcher ignores the unique problems posed by latter-day revelation and modern scripture.

What do we do, for example, with 2 Nephi 2:22 which virtually eliminates if not birth then at least death (a necessary condition for evolution) for "all creation" prior to the Fall? What

are we to do with Moses 3:7 which names Adam not just as the "first man" in God's image but the "first flesh upon the earth," all things having been created spiritually before? Premen may not have been men, but they had to be flesh.

Using Gen. 2:24 and its reference to leaving father and mother to suggest that premen were the parents of Adam and Eve assumes that Adam wrote the book of Genesis. It is more likely that the phrase is an editorial comment by Moses directed to his audience. Gen. 1:21, 22, 24, 25 is a commandment to multiply and fill up the earth not a description of the prevailing conditions.

For reconciliation to work both sides of the question must be satisfied, and Mormon theology is left unsatisfied by the premen speculation.

However, I can wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Fletcher's conclusions that belief in God need not be threatened by fossil evidence and that the creation story is more important in explaining the purpose of life than its genesis. "The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how one goes to heaven and not how heaven goes."—Galilei Galileo, Letter to Grand Duchess Christina quoting "an ecclesiastic of most eminent degree." (St. Augustine?)

Richard C. Russell  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### Not Alone After All

I enjoyed reading the article: "An Attempt at Reconciliation," by Robert C. Fletcher. I found that his views on a Creator and on Evolution are very similar to my own. And, I was pleased to see this viewpoint expressed by a fellow Mormon in a Mormon publication. It is encouraging to find that you are not alone or all that different.

Brother Fletcher might be interested to hear about a book that I read recently entitled: *The Monkey Business—A Scientist Looks at Creationism*, by Niles Eldredge. In this book, the author examines the arguments put forth by the Fundamentalist Creationists who are trying so hard to mandate that their views are taught in the schools. He points out fallacies in their arguments, especially those relating to their claims that the earth was created in six days of 24 hours each. He also mentions that there is a third, or middle, ground consisting of those religiously inclined scientists who believe both in a Creator and in Evolution. Mr. Eldredge goes on to say that the Fundamentalist Creationists hate and fear these

religious evolutionists even more than they do the strictly secular scientists who advocate evolution.

Also, in case he is not already familiar with it, there is a work called *The Urantia Book* which sets forth an explanation of the origin of Man which is practically the same as his own. *Urantia Book* says that the first true men were a set of twins, male and female, who were born to prehuman primate parents as mutations. These twins, according to *Urantia*, left their tribe and parents as adolescents and traveled to a far country where they lived together in isolation. They later mated and produced offspring, who were truly human just as they were. Thus, they were the progenitors of homo sapiens and could, figuratively speaking, be called "Adam and Eve."

I was encouraged to read in this SUNSTONE article that the First Presidency has made that statement that "The Church has taken no official position on the matter of evolution and related matters." Thus, the door is left open for those of us who hold to this middle ground, even though we are in the minority. The more popular Mormon view is expressed by books such as those by Cleon Skousen—"The First Two Thousand Years; The Second Two Thousand Years."

In this connection also, I recall an article in the old *Improvement Era* way back around 1940 in which then President David O. McKay answered a question about the Age of the Earth. As I remember it, he said that there are three views about this, as follows: (1) the earth was created in six days of 24 hours each; (2) the earth was created in six days of 1,000 years each; (3) the earth was created in six stages, each of which lasted for millions of years. President McKay then went on to say that there are good Mormons who hold to each of these views and that the Church, as such, takes no position either for or against any of these views. Thus, we are free to accept any of these views, whichever seems most reasonable to us.

W.H. Sanderson  
Salt Lake City, Utah

#### **Spiritless Preman**

Robert C. Fletcher aptly titled his article "An Attempt at Reconciliation" (SUNSTONE v. 7. No. 1). Unfortunately he failed in his attempt. Any effort to reconcile religious and scientific differences in any area of investigation must provide

explanations that are in harmony with the scriptural information available. A suggested theory to reconcile the difference between evolution and creation that disregards scriptural evidence is suspect.

We learn from Abraham 5:5, Moses 3:5, D&C 29:31-34, and Genesis (I.V.)2:5 that there were two creations: spiritual, then temporal. Moses' account of the spiritual creation is that the Lord "created all things . . . spiritually before they were naturally upon the face of the earth."

The attempt to reconcile creation and evolution by speculating that Adam and Eve were the offspring of spiritless preman is simply not in harmony with modern scripture. I suggest, therefore, that Mr. Fletcher change the "scenario."

Gordon F. Holloway  
Hot Springs, South Dakota

#### **Speculation Without Guilt or Apology**

Thank you, Robert C. Fletcher, for your speculative piece, "An Attempt at Reconciliation."

I like speculation. It's exciting, entertaining, and it doesn't require obedience, faith, or sacrifice. Speculation only asks for thought. Best of all, I am free to accept, reject, alter, or expand on a speculation without guilt or apology.

For example, I can easily come up with alterations, or alternatives, to Fletcher's speculation, i.e., that God assigned Adam to the evolution-derived body of a "preman." None of my speculations are more or less valid than Fletcher's (but they may be more or less logical):

(1) God created Adam and Eve by simply breaking down the bicameral mind in two selected pre-persons (Adam and Eve). This speculation associates the development of consciousness with the origin of the soul (see Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.*)

(2) God transported Adam and Eve to earth from another place. All pre-Adam evolution on earth was in preparation for Adam's entry. Natural evolution of plants, animals, and premen were required so that solutions to human needs would be available. Premen died out, like other evolutionary species, probably before Adam's appearance.

(3) God created Adam through the "Pinocchio" method, i.e., a good fairy (an angel) comes down to earth and

through magic (the priesthood) converts Geppetto's (evolution's) wooden puppet (Fletcher's preman) into a real boy (the soul of Adam).

These examples range from the sublime to the silly to the sacrilegious, depending on your makeup. But so what? Speculation is nothing more than this: thoughts, ideas, conjectures. We are free, of course, to evaluate the logic of a speculation. And we should. But we are not free to assign to it "right" or "wrong" titles. We should avoid judging the speculators as sinner or saint.

If a speculation appears to have merit, it can be studied, supported, and perhaps validated. It may eventually graduate to a theory, or even to a truth, doctrine, or law. But then, it must live by different rules and ceases to be a speculation.

We ought to encourage two things: (1) speculation (because it encourages thought and the development of knowledge), and (2) the unmistakable identification of a speculation (because when a speculation is quietly ushered in through the back door, it is often allowed to depart the front door masquerading as truth or doctrine).

D. Jeff Burton  
Salt Lake City

#### **In God's Due Time**

The article, "An Attempt at Reconciliation," by Dr. R.C. Fletcher was very well conceived. I am impressed with the author's research on the "compatibility of the evolution versus creation" and agree on the timeliness of such a discourse.

But I would like to ask a question: Was it necessary for the God of this great universe, to depend on inferior creatures—"preman"—in order to provide the earthly bodies for a man and a woman similar to His own divine body? Surely this was done by the perfect knowledge of the same natural laws by which Moses caused the Red Sea to divide or by which Jonah was preserved in the belly of the fish. To know "how" these supreme laws work can only be the prerogative of the Gods. It does not seem reasonable that "preman" parents, who were mortal, could produce bodies that were not subject to death (Adam and Eve) until their expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

There is no conflict in my mind regarding the evolutionary process of this earth, evidenced by bone and fossil material from "over several million years ago," except I perceive that these objects and particles arrived

from other much older planets during the creation period. No one knows how long it took to create this earth. Neither does anybody know where the material came from which enabled the master Creator(s) to organize the earth. I believe that God, who has revealed so much already of His "work and glory" will, in due time, allow a glimpse into His secrets. Perhaps it will be in the day when man has learned to love unconditionally.

Carla Sansom  
Westlake Village, California

### Creation and Evolution: Bad Bedfellows

While I empathize with R.C. Fletcher's article on evolution and creation, "An Attempt at Reconciliation" (SUNSTONE V. 7:1), I see a myriad of pitfalls, tortuous and unnecessary explanations, and a confusing mixture of metaphors. Biblical creation and scientific evolution do not make good "bed fellows."

Fletcher argues that "the theory of evolution [is an area]—where the observations are meager and critical tests difficult to perform." The fact is that evolution is supported by a vast amount of concordant data compiled by many fields (e.g., comparative anatomy, genetics, biochemistry, embryology—to name a few) and not merely paleontology as the article seems to suggest.

The creation story of the Bible was written by non-scientific men in a non-scientific age. While its prose is beautiful and inspiring, it cannot begin to explain the mysteries and development of life. For that matter, much mystery still remains for science. The point is that scientific evolution and biblical creation begin from totally different world views.

The account of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden must be either viewed as an allegory, beautiful as it is, or accepted as literal fact. Mormon theology does not seem to allow for Adam and Eve existing with their "premen cousins." Numerous questions arise: What about *all* things being created in immortality? (See McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*). Was Adam an Anglo-Saxon type as commonly depicted? What happened to all of the premen and their progeny?

Mormons, it seems, have three options in viewing Genesis and Darwin's position: (1) Accept biblical creation as literal fact and reject scientific evolution. (2) Eden, with its two inhabitants, represents a rich and

powerful allegory concerning Man's emergence into a reflective, conscious and religious being. (3)

Compartmentalize the two world views and don't subject their inherent conflicts to careful scrutiny. The latter solution is probably opted for by most Mormons.

Reconciliation as advocated by Dr. Fletcher may be an admirable task, but I fear it leaves intellectual and spiritual debris rather than clarifying and tidying the dilemma.

R.J. Stout, M.D.  
Salt Lake City, Utah

### Bravissimo for New Columns

Bravo and bravissimo on your January-February 1982 issue. The addition of columns is, I hope, a fixture and not an experiment. I've seldom read anything that tickled and sobered me more than Marvin Rytting's confessions from his stake financial clerk's office. I found myself recognizing all kinds of feelings of relief that I'd never admitted before about similar pressures and secret satisfactions.

And Marybeth Raynes's lucid discussion of intimacy is a promise of such thoughtful insights that I'm already anticipating the next installment.

Lavina Fielding Anderson  
Salt Lake City

P.S. And why not identify them on the table of contents page with the author's name?

### Cardboard History

Lawrence Foster's "New Perspectives on the Mormon Past" (SUNSTONE 7:1) arrived just as I was finishing Merlo Pusey's *Builders of the Kingdom*, the excellent life stories of George A. Smith, John Henry Smith, and President George Albert Smith. Foster's comments come, of course, at a time when LDS historians are being urged to write "faithful history," a euphemism for dishonesty. Pusey's work is an example of history which is candid enough to admit that Church leaders were and are not perfect. The question is, does it tear down faith? No! To the contrary, for the first time these particular figures became alive to me, the details made Church history a living thing from which I gained valuable insights. I admire these three men far more now even though I learned, for example, that they disagreed with some of their peers.

It is this very attempt to hide aspects

of our history—from the Mountain Meadows Massacre, to Joseph Smith's "peepstone" trial, to our connections with Masonry, or Brigham Young's comments on Adam-God—which has consistently embarrassed us and destroyed the credibility of the Church in the eyes of many. "We have met the enemy and he is us!" The main anti-Mormon literature—Brodie, Tanners, Walters, Martin, etc.—was produced without access to the Church archives. On the other hand, the best history, by Hill, Arrington, and Bitton, for example, has benefited from the ability to research and talk about our past honestly. It is far easier to defend the faith when you are on solid ground rather than mutually relying on rumors. Until D. Michael Quinn was able to thoroughly research the subject we had false impressions about the Council of Fifty. Would we be better off with the files closed?

It is true that it would be improper to try to write history which emphasizes mistakes and weaknesses of the figures involved without the balance which shows their superior qualities. We do need to be reminded that history is, by nature, constructed selectively and not everything is relevant. But would anyone suggest that the biographies of Camilla or Spencer Kimball would have been more faith-promoting if they had pictured them as cardboard one-dimensional figures with little relationship to the daily lives most people experience?

Scott S. Smith  
Thousand Oaks, California

### Systematic Theology, A Dubious Enterprise

Systematic theologizing is a dubious enterprise. Attempts at systematization by Catholic and Protestant thinkers over the past 15 centuries have done more to confuse and mislead than to clarify truth and promote faith. Theologians fail because they start with inadequate definitions and premises, proceed with a limited concept of logic, and arrive at indefensible or incorrect conclusions. In contrast to "all their creeds" which were "an abomination" in his sight, the Lord provides an alternative message and method: the scriptures which contain a set of general principles and some stories of faithful lives amidst fallen peoples and individual access to the Holy Spirit for personal revelation regarding understanding and application of the scriptural lessons in one's own life. But modern Mormons seem to be

learning the wrong lesson from history: rather than avoid the temptation to "improve" upon divine provision we seem to be nurturing a new scholasticism. An example of such ill-conceived effort recently appeared in *SUNSTONE* (6, 6): Kim McCall's "What is Moral Obligation within Mormon Theology?"

If McCall's style is confusing, his/her content represents a great leap backward. McCall mixes problems of Protestant theology and classical western philosophy with Aristotelian logic, imposes them on some interpretation of LDS scripture, and formulates a grotesque theory. Restoration concepts of God, mankind, their relationship, creation, salvation, and so on, are radically different from those of historical Christianity. Hence any discussion of LDS "philosophy" relying on traditional categories, paradigms, and problem statements is doomed in advance to failure. Mormon language may look like standard English, but no dictionary definitions can illuminate the word-symbols associated with the Restored Gospel. Like McMurrin, McCall fails to understand that Mormon logic is more dialectical than categorical, that both/and more than either/or characterize it, and that its reality is dual/plural rather than monistic. A Stanford education in philosophy and reliance on Kant and McMurrin make for blinders in the classical Greek mode of perception which, in this instance, did not get transcended.

McCall may well be a good and faithful Mormon, but as a theologian s/he seems to be in the wrong century and church.

Any criticisms made of McCall apply even more to the non-Mormon philosopher Appleby and his article. Reconciling the existence of evil and of a "benevolent deity" who is (in some sense) omnipotent, omniscient, and just may be "troublesome" for the world of "great orthodox traditions." The Restored Gospel is not concerned about "evil in the universe" but about necessary opposition in this world. Tribulation and temptation are integral to this mortal probation and experience. Without them we would not have choice nor opportunity for growth and joy. There is no LDS scripture (in my awareness) that suggests a god who wants to eliminate them from the universe; rather, it suggests one who so designed it. LDS scripture simply does not suggest any suffering which could be called "pointless" or any death that would be "tragic" (in the classic sense

of that term). Rather, "In this life ye shall have tribulation" and "be believing, and all things shall work together for your good. . . ." Death is no more tragic (under any circumstances) than birth; it is a transition, both an end and a beginning. Indeed, death is a release from the injustices of men and a step toward encountering the justice of God. Death is, to the true Christian, only transitory, having been overcome in the resurrection of Jesus. Life is in God's hands in so far that no one dies before his time be fulfilled and that death has been conquered. It is only the philosophies of a fallen world that fear death and misunderstand the simultaneity of good and evil. And so it is only such thinking that seeks a "finitist" resolution which denies divine power to perform miracles because of an alleged "problem of evil" which is utterly intractable with regard to any deity possessing such powers."

But, however misguided Appleby's theologizing, I must celebrate his wise and beautiful final sentence: "If we conceive of God as that being which is uniquely worthy of worship, it might well be worth considering how loyal we should remain to the adoration of sheer power." Following which I would recommend an immediate reading by all Mormons of Pres. Kimball's Bicentennial message: "The False Gods We Worship" (*Ensign*, June 1976).

T. Allen Lambert  
Ithaca, New York

#### Why Print It?

I am amazed that the editors of a magazine that purports to be "Uniquely Mormon," a forum for exclusively religious ideas and values, would print the coarse and profane language in "The Genealogy of Della B. Paulsen" by Joseph Peterson and "The Shriveprice" by Levi S. Peterson. I am disappointed that two writers of such obvious talents have so little sensitivity and refinement. Any person concerned about religion should shrink from using such language in speech or in writing. The editors of any magazine concerned about religion should at least make sure that the names of Deity are not profaned in the fiction they publish.

I have subscribed to *SUNSTONE* for over a year and have been consistently pleased with the quality of the articles. I have particularly looked forward to reading some Mormon fiction that didn't have a happy ending. But to protest this vulgarity and profanity (such an ugly blot on a fine piece of fiction,

especially in the case of "The Shriveprice") I will not renew.

I quote Spencer W. Kimball, who, like your magazine, is uniquely Mormon:

Why do authors sell themselves so cheaply and desecrate their God-given talents? Why do they profane and curse? Why do they take in their unholy lips and run through their sacrilegious pens the names of their own Creator, the holy names of their Redeemer? Why do they ignore his positive command?

I would add, and why do editors print it?

Yvonne (Mrs. Charles R.) Harrell  
Kaysville, Utah

#### Mature Vision Lacking in Story

Joseph Peterson's prize-winning story, "The Genealogy of Della B. Paulsen," is an interesting example of the difficulty of writing Mormon fiction.

The story deals with the sixteen-year-old-protagonist's search for identity in a small Mormon community that is remarkable for its brutality and hypocrisy. The question of "Who am I?" is complicated by an adulterous grandmother whose betrayed husband is the only human being with whom Della feels any kinship. Grandpa Huey is a character whose reality is lost in the complex symbolism the author burdens him with. The old man is cuckolded, accused of incest, committed to a mental hospital, emasculated, and eaten alive by cancer—evidently the only possible fate for the natural man imprisoned in the Puritanical hypocrisy of a narrow society. His cancer-ravaged face frightens children, but Della regards him as sacred, made holy through his suffering. But his character is not convincing; the reader remains on the outside of Grandpa Huey and the emotion he inspires is a combination of pity, revulsion, and irritation. He reminds one of the characters in naturalistic novels that are doomed from the moment of conception by a combination of their own nature and an inscrutable and malevolent fate. Anyone who loses that often without putting up a fight of some kind is simply unbelievable. The old man eventually drowns as he performs his ritual bath in the canal. Thus Della ends her story with grief, fornication with her current boyfriend, and an anguished assertion that she *is* Della B. Paulsen. The ending is ambiguous, either by default or intention. Either Della has discovered who she is, or she has not, or perhaps the conclusion means she has discovered that adultery, like her "blood-spot freckles" is transmitted genetically and her

genealogy dooms her to submit to the Billys of her world.

Although the writing is vivid and many of the images sharp and clear (but how pray tell does a grown man "squat" in the "crotch" of a tree?), Mr. Peterson falls victim to one of the two traps for Mormon writers: either the picture of Mormon life and Mormon characters is so idealized that any conflict with evil—which always appears as an intrusive, outside force connected with gentiles—is merely an opportunity to demonstrate faith; or, with a kind of inverse sentimentality Mormon society becomes a stifling straight jacket for the soul and Mormon characters are divided between the sensitive, rebellious sinful (usually young) and the rigid, Puritanical hypocrites (usually the faithful).

The latter vision is the one Mr. Peterson presents in his story. The idea that sin might *not* be a cry of protest against a hypocritical world but rather a manifestation of the evil within, or that strong men might also be weak or good men sin, or that sin might eventually bring one to a broken heart and a contrite spirit never seems to affect his creation of character. The adulterous wife-abusing bishop in the story has all the stereotyped flatness of the mustache-twirling villain in a melodrama. The atmosphere in Della's town is achieved through cataloging every scandalous story ever circulated about the Church. The result is distortion that serves no artistic purpose.

One might argue that Faulkner uses the same method in creating his Yoknapatawpha County, but Faulkner's world of moral failure is the result of the dual sins he sees in Southern history: the enslavement of the blacks and the destruction of the virgin wilderness through private ownership. Mr. Peterson's world seems to be the outgrowth of the pioneer trek west and the attempt to build Zion. Mormon society is not without fault, but promoting injustice, brutality, or hypocrisy has never been the aim of the gospel of Jesus Christ or those who believe it.

Idealistic youth's first realization that even good men must battle with appetite, selfishness, and pride and that occasionally there are those who lose the fight, can produce cynicism. But mature vision can encompass the whole man, both good and evil. It is to be hoped that Mr. Peterson acquires that vision to match his talent.

Mae Blanch  
Brigham Young University

# Outside Looking In

## BOOZE WITHOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER SINLESS SUBSTITUTES

Ray Ownbey

Growing up as a middle-of-the-road Baptist in a small Oregon town, I was always glad that my family was not as hard-nosed as some. We went to movies and we went to dances, although there were those who did not.

However, in spite of our relatively liberal background, we were always cautioned to be tolerant of others whose standards were more restrictive than ours and to be very cautious about our own behavior. Specifically, we were admonished always to avoid the "appearance of evil." Even if *we* were doing no wrong, being in a place where others *were* or where someone with a weaker faith might see our example was not a good idea.

Now, due to the ingenuity of some clever entrepreneurs and chemists, it is possible for a select group to practice just the reverse of that principle. That is, Mormons in Utah and non-drinkers everywhere can now enjoy the appearance of evil without the substance. They can look like they're drinking without actually doing so.

The bottles look like wine bottles. They have corks. And the labels identify the contents as wine (with alcohol removed), so that if you squint you can't even tell the difference between that stuff and the real thing.

I've been trying to figure out just why one would want to drink alcohol-less wine. Most of the reasons I've come up with aren't very satisfying. Is it because people like the taste? (How would a non-drinker know if it was good or bad wine?) Is it to settle the stomach or calm the nerves? Without the alcohol, I don't think that works. Is it to make the world think you're just like everybody else, while you

keep your different standards a secret? Maybe we're getting closer now.

There's something at work here which is made to order for a lot of Utah Mormons. And it has to do with a preference for appearance over substance, for form over content, for the way things look rather than the way things are.

Drinking is not the issue here but rather a sort of Shirley Temple attitude (the drink, not the actress). Remember Shirley Temples, the soft-drink-with-a-cherry concoction that children had along with mom and dad so the kids would feel like grownups? With no-booze booze, we have the same mentality at work: adults pretend to be grown-ups, or something like that.

Of course Utah Mormons are not the only people who are victims of this way of thinking. We all suffer from it, in one form or another. But here it is institutionalized. It is promoted and encouraged by the most powerful organization in the state.

A good example has to do with Mormon church music. (I've come a long way from the no-booze booze, but I'll get back to that.) I've been to enough Mormon meetings to get a feel for the kind of music that is used in Church services. The curious thing is that it is not necessarily religious music, but it evidently has to "sound" religious. I've never heard a guitar or saxophone in a Mormon service, but I've heard Verdi and Wagner whose operas dealt with lust and adultery and all that raunchy stuff. Out of context, I guess those composers "sound" religious.

The attitude is seen elsewhere, this confusion of what is with what appears. As I understand it, Mormon church policy permits behind the scenes financial involvement in gambling but not up front, on-the-floor participation in Nevada casinos. So there are no good Mormons  
**continued on p. 60**