

Readers' Forum

SUNSTONE welcomes letters from our readers and prints a representative sample of opinions. All letters represent the attitudes of the writers and not necessarily those of the editors or publisher. To be considered for publication, letters should not exceed 300 words. Any letter may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. A more lengthy letter will be treated like a manuscript submission.

Scientific and Scriptural Evidence

I would like to respond to the various comments appearing in the Readers Forum of the May-June '82 SUNSTONE on my paper, "An Attempt at Reconciliation." Two letters (Russell, Holloway) point to additional scriptures which seem to contradict creation by an evolutionary process:

No death before the Fall (cf. II Nephi 2:22): This seems to imply that Adam and Eve's Fall brought mortality not only to mankind, but to all living creatures. This interpretation is clearly incompatible with life and death existing for a billion years before Adam. I suggest it is possible to interpret these scriptures differently. The principal point is that being made is that the entire creation would have been without purpose if Adam and Eve had not fallen—that "all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were created" with no temptations of man and no probation, no progression, and no opportunity to be added upon for joy. I suggest that Luke was not commenting so much on the state of life before Adam but rather emphasizing that the purpose of all creation could be fulfilled only through the mortality of man.

No flesh before Adam (cf. Moses 3:7): Flesh in this context probably refers to man and not to animals or premen. Clearly, the animals were created before Adam (cf. Moses 2:24, 25). I have extended the interpretation to include the highest form of animal, premen.

Spiritless premen (cf. Abraham 5:15, D&C 29:31-34, and Genesis 2:5): I see

nothing irreconcilable in having premen "created spiritually before they were naturally upon the face of the earth" in the same way all other things were created spiritually. I suggested only that if this means premen had spirits, they were different from those of men which were in the image of God.

Next I would like to comment on the letters of Burton, Sansom, and Stout under the headings speculation, limiting God, and Adam and Eve story as an allegory, respectively.

Speculation. Although speculation is essential for scientific investigation, it is of more limited value in a religious context and can be downright dangerous if the speculator comes to believe his speculations too strongly. My intent in using it on this occasion was an attempt to calm some troubled waters. Religion does not have anything to fear from the paleontologists, and scientists do not have to despair that religion needs to reject evidence and reason; I suggested at least one speculation that reconciles the differences. If there are superior speculations, so much the better.

Limiting God. As far as I'm concerned, God has the capability to carry out His purposes in whatever way He chooses. My biggest concern is with people who insist that God must have used a means of which they approve. If God chose to create man through the process of evolutionary process, why should we insist that He must have done it some other way? Why is it unreasonable that "preman" parents, who were mortal, could produce bodies that were not subject to death, when that same process was later true of Enoch, the Three Nephites, and John the Revelator? But I don't want to insist either that God did it in a way I approve. The only thing that I feel most strongly is that we not reject the evidence obtained from scientific investigations because it disagrees with our man-made interpretation of how God must have worked.

Adam and Eve story as an allegory. It is very popular among liberal thinkers

and scientists to consider the story of Adam and Eve as an allegory, which therefore does not have to be reconciled with scientific observations. This may be satisfying to the scientists but has the danger of destroying Divine meaning. We must face up to what is essential in the story to preserve the main message. For instance, calling it an allegory cannot duck the issue that there must have been a creation, for without the concepts of creation by an intelligent being(s) there can be no purpose to man's life, and thus there is no gospel. Creation implies intervention, which is at odds with the theory of evolution as being developed by the scientists. Treating the story as an allegory does not remove the dilemma.

The story of Adam and Eve is not only an affirmation of creation and purpose to man's existence but also an indication of what that purpose is, particularly as clarified in latter-day scripture. I am quite content to have the dilemma unresolved in detail awaiting further clarification through revelation as long as no church leaders insist that I disregard the basic scientific evidence, and no scientists insist that I disregard the evidence of the spirit which convinces me of the truthfulness of the Gospel. Since both of these possibilities are threatening, I feel it is important to attempt some reconciliation.

R.C. Fletcher
Summit, New Jersey

Literally Unbelievable

Quite some time ago I received a little packet of material from you, which, I suppose, was meant to acquaint me with your organization and to encourage me to consider Mormonism as a religion. I believe you refer to yourselves as a "foundation for Mormon studies."

Few indeed are those who have studied Mormonism more, longer, and harder than I have since about 1965 when I went to Utah and could not even get serious consideration for a decent job because I wasn't a Mormon. The reason for that, as has been insisted by some of my Mormon friends, was not for lack of available jobs.

Many newspaper job ads even went so far as to require membership in the church by such statements as: "Need not apply unless LDS," or "LDS preferred," or "only LDS will be considered." It was not until 1974, after the federal non-discrimination laws had been passed, that I was able to get a job and hold it any longer than until my employer found out I was not a Mormon, and then only in

Federal service.

Quite by accident I got my hands on a Book of Mormon. It was the first literature of Mormonism I read. Since then I have read the History of the Church, some of it several times.

I was appalled when I read the Book of Mormon and even more so when I read the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price. In fact, I have read some parts of them over and over again in an effort to convince myself that what I was reading, and seeing around me, was true. To me it was literally unbelievable, and appalling, that a church could be built upon a collection of documents such as those.

In order that you may not come to the conclusion that I have been brainwashed by someone else let it be known that I read all your doctrinal and most of your historical and other literature long before I was even aware of the existence of such people as the Tanners, John L. Smith, Wally Tope and the Concerned Christians of Mesa, Arizona. I came to the conclusion I adhere to through reading your own literature, and that should tell you something.

It would be very interesting to me to have all those wise oracles in your "foundation for Mormon studies" come up with an explanation of BM Alma 34:36 and D&C 130:1, 2 and 3. How can they reconcile the two? This is just one of hundreds of such cases in your literature.

I have many friends who are Mormons. Obviously one of them sent my name as a joke. There is not one of them who do not know that there is just about as much chance that I will join the Mormon Church as there is that even so much as one tenth of the prophecy and revelation of Joseph Smith is true.

John F. Durham
Sedona, Arizona

Look at the Underlying Assumptions
Certain assumptions, though seldom if ever stated, seem to underlie the viewpoint of several whose statements have prominently appeared in SUNSTONE. I don't recall you as yet publishing anything that might counterbalance those assumptions and would therefore like to call them to your readers' attention.

I would say that a number of the statements I have in mind—often by non-LDS guest speakers at the Sunstone Theological Symposium—tend to presuppose that any particular doctrinal position or religious practice

is relative to any other and that it is the great need of Latter-day Saints to acquire the kind of humanitarian sophistication that would free them from the parochial bias that their own beliefs and practices are necessarily superior to or exclusive of those in other religious traditions.

This assumption clearly underlies Kenneth Woodward's keynote address at last year's Symposium, entitled "The Use and Abuse of Religion," as it appeared in the March-April 1982 issue of SUNSTONE. Little room is left for personal witness to anything traditional when we are told that we must choose between a pretense at "certitude" or "humility"—as if the two were in all cases mutually exclusive. Woodward also informs his respectful Mormon audience of his distaste for "those who insist on peddling religion door-to-door as if religion could be sold like Avon products." Since there is hardly a Mormon alive who has not come into the Kingdom because of such proselyting—either of himself or his ancestors—we should, I suppose, feel "cheapened" that we have come to know the restored gospel by such shabby and ulterior means. Woodward might do well however to consult with just about any recent convert to know what it has meant to him or her to have a pair of dogged Elders or Sisters finally arrive at his/her doorstep and how the convert reveres those who brought him or her the message that has so changed his/her life.

Most ironic is that Woodward and his ilk claim to be objective and implicitly castigate Mormons for being otherwise—Woodward himself being a nationally recognized journalist. I find a similar critical blindspot and lack of detachment in the social historian and frequent contributor to SUNSTONE, Lawrence Foster, who, at the recent meetings of the Mormon History Association, for instance, urged Mormons to consider the more egalitarian governing style of the Quakers, which he happens to prefer. (Objectively speaking, so what?) Such statements also totally ignore the possibility that modes of religious practice—particularly LDS—might have ever been prescribed by Deity and expressly revealed through His appointed earthly representatives, or that it is ever man's obligation to accept God's revelation, however strange, rather than make it over in terms of the individual's personal likes and dislikes (the old apostate tendency with which we are well enough acquainted: this is after all nothing very new).

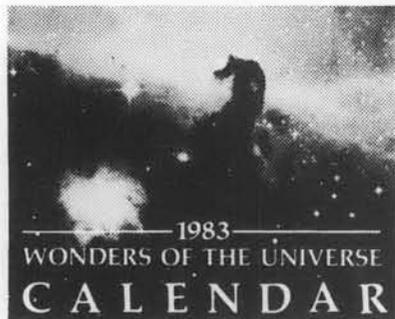
The tone of these "experts' "

recommendations is in fact at considerable variance with even the New Testament Christianity to which they purport a certain allegiance: The early disciples were clearly sent out two by two and told moreover to shake the dust from their feet when departing from "that house" which did not receive them (Matthew 10:14). There was also clearly a powerful hierarchy among the early apostles and other Church leaders which both interpreted doctrine and issued unequivocal assignments and norms of behavior to the members-at-large. Their justification for doing so was invariably that they had special access to divine revelation in behalf of the rest of the Church: "... no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20). Most important, in all we ever read in the gospels about faith, conviction, testimony or whatever we may wish to call it, there is never any indication that we should not believe implicitly but rather arbitrarily or with a myriad of "broad minded" provisos and qualifications. On the contrary, we are warned, as was Joseph Smith upon reading James, what shallow and wavering faith comes to.

I was very pleased with the earlier observations by one of your columnists and a nominal member, Marvin Rytting, when he pointed out the numerous paradoxes in our religious life in an earlier *Dialogue* article (XII:4, pp. 106-112). I recognize them too and feel we need to be far more aware of them than we are. It is also refreshing to see him assert, along with Hans Kung, that we all ultimately "choose to believe." But the position Rytting takes in his latest "Paradoxes and Perplexities"—"In Danger of Spewing"—is pathetic indeed. I grant that it may be important to hear from and empathize with those who can do no more than say, "I do not think it is possible to know for a certainty that the Church is true in a literal sense." But to fancy that such a position, where faith is concerned, is the optimal way to see things and not to envy those with more deep-rooted convictions and hope, however long it may take, to receive some day a more fervent witness oneself is again completely antithetical to the New Testament's frequent exhortations and compelling examples of self-sacrificing, miracle-provoking faith, and it immediately closes the door on the prospect of further transcendent contact through the exercise of such faith or even the

aspiration for it. (In saying this much, I readily admit that everyone's faith wavers and that there are 'dry spells' when we do not receive the same confirmations or intimations of the Spirit we perhaps once did. But to deny the possibility of its forcibly, overwhelmingly, undeniably manifesting itself to us is indeed to reject that mystical, transcendent power—call it what we will—without which religion is most abstract and sterile.) For one who has felt these things deeply—as many a Mormon has—or for anyone who fairly accepts the fundamental terms and conditions of Christian faith the statement "I am—and shall continue to be—Mormon irrespective of whether the LDS church is the only true church on the face of the earth or not" is perhaps poignant, even stoically heroic, but otherwise terribly inane.

There may be a clue to Rytting's arms-length detachment in the churlish delight he expressed in an earlier SUNSTONE column about having been luckily sequestered in the calling of a stake financial clerk, where he, a professional psychologist no less, could keep himself safely apart from his flesh-and-blood fellow members and their repugnant, time-consuming personal quirks and demands on others. I would urge Brother Rytting to read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's inspired



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manual on Christian Fellowship, *Life Together*, and reconsider his cultivated avoidance of the admittedly arduous and inconvenient task it is to interact with one's fellow Saints. Again, religion is utterly lifeless without deep, intimate fellowship, which is or ought to be one of the special rewards and satisfactions of our labors in the Kingdom. Indeed, our interaction with fellow Saints, fraught as it so often is with tears, slights, and difficult strain, is—blessing in disguise—one of the chief ways we come to know the truth of that about which we have been called to witness.

There is surely much which we have religiously in common with others. The Lord has, I believe, had more of a hand in the world's great religious traditions, even the non-Christian, and surely also in the lives of all other men and women, than we are often inclined to recognize. SUNSTONE and the other publications of our time which are authored and published by unflinching honest and essentially loyal and faithful Mormons have done much to broaden our perspectives and diminish our pharasaism. But, much as others may yet have to teach us about basic tolerance, authentic spirituality, and Christian virtue, it is equally a mistake to overlook all that, in the restored Church and gospel, is so truly distinctive and profound and might in turn contribute to the world's enlightenment and edification. There is still place and great need for its thoughtful yet forthright and unapologetic exposition in our Church-related publications.

Tom Rogers
 Brigham Young University

Feeling Peculiar—Without and Within
 Stanley B. Kimball's comments concerning the Word of Wisdom in the March-April 1982 issue of SUNSTONE precisely summed up my own feelings on this controversial subject.

This is a very important issue, and I strongly urge that SUNSTONE respond affirmatively to Mr. Kimball's suggestion that pages be opened to "a thorough and responsible examination of the matter."

Mr. Kimball's compassion and sensitivity are evident in his letter. I could truly relate to his tone having been one of those "ostracized children" he wrote of. Since my return to the Church, I have often felt "peculiar" outside its walls, even in front of my own non-member husband and friends. Then again I have felt "peculiar" within the Church for not being so narrow-minded as most Mormons.

I certainly look forward to SUNSTONE as a place where I can read things and not feel peculiar. Things I can relate to, that stimulate me towards becoming a better person. I feel people have a lot to gain by sharing their knowledge concerning the will of God on this planet earth.

Janet Layton-Arribas
 Pasadena, California

Apostles or Disciples?

Under your recent "Scriptural Commentary" you blew me out of the water when you said Jesus called twelve apostles in America. My Book of Mormon indicates that twelve disciples, not apostles, were called in America.

Hal Pierce
 Edmond, Oklahoma

Hypothetical, But Not Heretical

In a letter on the "premen" Richard C. Russell quotes Galileo's famous epigram about scripture teaching us how to go to heaven, and not how the heavens go, and parenthetically wonders if the original author of the quotation, "an ecclesiastic of most eminent degree," might be St. Augustine.

It is certainly a trivial point, but Brother Russell might be interested in reading "The Galileo Affair," by Owen Gingerich, in the August 1982 issue of *Scientific American*. In it the author quotes the same epigram and says that Galileo borrowed it from Caesar Cardinal Baronius, then the librarian of the Vatican. The Cardinal was surely a most eminent churchman in his day, but not the equal in fame of Augustine.

This article deserves reading. Galileo's experience and the nature of his Church's response (it declared the Copernican system hypothetical, but not heretical) has much to say to us about conflict between religion and science and the changing nature of accepted truth.

Nancy Leek
 Bakersfield, California

King Fails to Convince

Arthur Henry King's article, "Are Mormons Joining in World Suicide?" (May-June 1982) fails to convince me that the world is committing suicide or that Mormons are joining in that act. In his caustic and disjointed criticisms, King summarily dismisses the world's cultures, politics, social sciences, and media. According to King, modern art is all "self-pity" and "destruction." Governments—never mind whether democratic or fascist, for "there's no ultimate difference between them"—are all full of "gangsters." Can anyone take



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seriously King's assertion that Churchill and Hitler are ultimately of the "same spirit?" Is there no good to be said for individualism, goals, self-esteem, or capitalism? Obviously, every virtue has its vice—and the above are no exceptions—but King's desire to attack whatever is spiritually destroying us obscures his vision of the good aspects of man and his world. Either King hasn't bothered to point out what he may find in our world which is "of good report or praiseworthy" or he sees a very different world than the one we live in.

The author's view of man is more akin to the medieval view of his utter worthlessness without God than the Mormon affirmation of the eternal, spiritual individual who can become like God himself by obedience to the laws of morality and through the Atonement of Christ. King thinks the Church should abandon its "insistence on individuality," which "is taking us towards . . . isolation. Our emphasis ought rather to be on the family." (Mormons don't emphasize the family?) The Mormon belief in individualism is a redeeming one which allows the individual the right to personal revelation and the ability to merit his or her salvation through Christ's atonement. To say that the doctrine of individualism is "profoundly anti-Gospel" is to misunderstand that doctrine—one that recognizes the worth and ability of the individual rather than reducing him to "nothing."

King is also completely against goal-setting. He says, "If planning with goals in mind does nothing else, it will tend to occlude the Holy Ghost." If we believe him, what becomes of the eternal perspective and the long-term goals which we *must* make in life in order to realize them? And yet he says, "If you aim at education, then you'll never become educated." If high students never aim at education then they'll never apply to college! How one can only focus on the present and realize the future is a mystery to me. As he does with individualism and

goals, King also finds the essence of capitalism with its "survival of the fittest" principle "profoundly anti-Christian and anti-Gospel." His statement is well argued. But later he says the reason that so many businessmen are called to be General Authorities is that "they are prepared for the task; the intellectuals are not." Since these businessmen were trained in a highly capitalistic society, how does King think they are prepared to guide a Christian religion if he feels the principles of capitalism are "profoundly anti-Christian?" Despite his denouncement of it, King must admit to certain practical qualities of capitalism.

I am also at odds with his all-out criticism of self-esteem. True, we find ourselves through others, but self-esteem is an important prerequisite to truly finding out who we are. As children of our Heavenly Father we should realize our individual worth. While self-forgetfulness may indeed be "prime," we must never forget who we are.

Finally, I wonder if King is correct when he says that "religion is prime and morality is secondary. . . . religion is deeper and more important than any morality that may emerge from it." Morality, it seems to me, does not "emerge" from religion. Religion emerges from man's imperfections and his need to be saved by obedience to a God who is always moral. The laws of morality are *eternal* and, in a sense, even condition God since he became God by obedience to those laws. The purpose of religion is the perfecting of human beings, which is God's work and glory. Thus religion's existence is contingent upon man's imperfections. While the Church can *not* exist, morality is a necessary and eternal fact of existence, for even if the Church were to become obsolete, i.e. man became perfect, the laws of morality would still be prime because they are what define perfection itself.

How does King think Mormons can keep from joining in world suicide? As

a church, our duty is to "attack the world by missioning." Attack? Rather than attack the world, why not understand it? Then we can more effectively teach it the Gospel. If the Church withdraws from the world only to criticize and attack it, we shall then be joining in world suicide.

William R. Handley
Westport, Connecticut

Shame!

Shame on SUNSTONE! A magazine with at least a pretense of intellectual sophistication printing the right wing blatherings of Jay Bybee. His one-sided "explanation" of the ERA issues in the Callister case surely made him official conservative LDS apologist, but with this piece we find he is also apologist for the racists of the United States.

Mr. Bybee misunderstands or purposely ignores the central issue in the Bob Jones case. Tax exempt status is not a right. It is a privilege. By granting tax exempt status to anyone, the body politic says that it is willing to subsidize it. For as surely as tax exempt status is granted, other taxpayers must pick up the tab, and pay the bills into the federal treasury. To suggest that the public has no rights through the courts, the legislative process, and the much-maligned federal bureaucracy, to demand institutions getting the benefits of the federal largess not conform to public policy is surely nonsense.

Bybee denies his article is "just conservative hype"—it is not—it is right wing hype, far to the right of any respectable conservative. It is a great disservice to publish this piece without some semblance of balance. Despite Mr. Bybee's obviously being comatose during the 60s and 70s, the public policy repudiating public support for discrimination (in schools, stores, voting, jobs, and yes, even education) has been painfully established over a long period of time. Perhaps Mr. Bybee and Bob Jones are the only persons unaware of it. The point, for him, must be that public policy is never to change—despite an overwhelming desire on the part of the rational public that it must change, a legislative mandate that it must change, and a mandate from the Supreme Court that it must change.

Let us hope that no one reads his piece with any degree of seriousness, but rather that they take it for the joke it surely is, and when they have finished it, toss it into the trash can with a laugh.

Kerry William Bate
Salt Lake City, Utah



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