

Is the Gospel Open to Closed Minds?

HOW MUCH TOLERANCE CAN WE TOLERATE?

By Arthur R. Bassett

TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO THIS FALL, I TOOK MY FAMILY back to Syracuse, New York, and began a doctoral program in humanities, centered in American Studies. One of my first classes concentrated on the writings of William James, and it was there I first experienced one of those turning points in education that affect one's life forever. One paragraph from a series of lectures James delivered at the Lowell Institute in December of 1906 changed forever the way I perceive people. It is from his fourth lecture titled "The One and the Many."

In this present hour I wish to . . . [focus] upon the ancient problem of "the one and the many." I suspect that in but few of you has this problem occasioned sleepless nights, and I should not be astonished if some of you told me it had never vexed you at all. I myself have come, by long brooding over it, to consider it the most central of all philosophic problems, central because so pregnant. I mean by this that if you know whether a man is a decided monist or a decided pluralist, you perhaps know more about the rest of his opinions than if you give him any other name ending in *ist*. To believe in the one or in the many, that is the classification with the maximum number of consequences. So bear with me for an hour while I try to inspire you with my own interest in this problem (*Pragmatism*, p. 90).

James uses the terms monism and pluralism, which are philosophical terms with cosmological implications. I suspect that if he had been a political scientist instead he might have used the terms conservative and liberal, which can (in the popularly used sense) be applied about the same way. James was a devout pluralist himself.

If his observation is right, and I am convinced that it is, then this means that the best index to a person's character is found in his or her ability to tolerate a variety of differing ideas and life styles. The question, then, I would have us consider is that of how

much tolerance we can tolerate?—both as individuals and as a people, and by extension, the more difficult problem of how much pluralism we *should* tolerate, and indeed encourage.

I have no resolution to that problem, but I do wonder about it often. I confess that I am basically a pluralist by conviction and am increasingly becoming so by temperament. I find stimulation and insight (as well as frustration) in viewpoints different from my own, especially within the Church context. My present concern stems from the fact that I sense I am a pluralist in a church whose membership is largely oriented toward monism.

As a people we have achieved a remarkable degree of homogeneity during the last century and a half. No one who has lived among us and been aware of our activities can doubt this. Some have suggested (though I am not prepared to agree without strong reservations) that we demonstrate a striking similarity even in our artistic and political views, in our dress, our thought, and our general demeanor. (One of my nonmember friends, who is a gourmet cook, jokes about "Mormon green punch," which he claims is standard fare at every LDS social.)

Whether these observations are accurate or not, it is true that we pride ourselves as a people that on any given Sunday, anywhere in the world, we can drop in on a Mormon meeting and feel as if we were in our home ward. The Correlation Program has unified, to an amazing degree, the things we will talk about and the way we will talk about them. Not only are we told what we should discuss, but (if one reads the teachers' manuals) also the conclusions that we should reach. The sermons we hear will be noticeably similar, both in content and style. And unless one is treated to the refreshing dissimilarity of the prayer of a new convert, the prayers will sound very much alike, especially the sacramental prayers (though we do not use chants in the manner of the Catholic church, the uniformity of rhythm, intonation, inflection, and accented words used in the sacrament prayer by our young priests throughout the world has always intrigued me).

Part of this is as it should be. No one would dispute that unity is one of the major themes (if not the dominant theme) of scripture. The essence of the gospel is found in a single word:

ARTHUR R. BASSETT is a professor of humanities at Brigham Young University. A version of this paper was presented at the Sunstone Symposium IX in Salt Lake City.

atonement (from the Old English *at-one-ment*). The gospel is literally the news of Christ's providing the way for us to be bonded together in love—with our Father in Heaven, with each other and with ourselves. Atonement is a proper synonym for love. It is at the core of everything the Church should represent.

Its antithesis—lack of unity—has been destructive to society at all levels. That seems to be the message of the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel, which is perpetuated chronologically through the image of Israel's enemy, Babylon (which has its etymological origins in the Hebrew word for confusion). This Old Testament event has its healing counterpart in the New Testament experience at Pentecost, where such confusion of tongues was suspended in Jerusalem (a name which has its roots in the Hebrew word for peace). Disruption of unity creates chaos, confusion, and conflict.

On the personal level, if I may alter Paul's famous passage slightly, the wages of sin proves to be alienation—estrangement from God, from self, or from others. I have found separation from those who matter most to be among the most unbearable of all punishments, among the most excruciating causes of suffering. Atonement binds and brings strength and comfort in troubled times; alienation divides and takes away all sense of worth and well-being.

The scriptures are filled with exhortations on unity. Zion was called Zion “. . . because they were of one heart and one mind” (Moses 7:18). John, in his Gospel, stresses continually the unity between Jesus and his Father: “I and my father are one” echoes throughout (John 10:30). And, while presenting his final petition to God before his struggles in Gethsemane and Golgotha, the Master prayed that his disciples would reflect the same sense of solidarity (John 17:20).

This unchanging theme dominates the epistles of Paul. The Corinthians are chastised for the petty divisions that are beginning to appear among them (1 Cor. 1:10). The Ephesians are admonished to remember that there is “one body, and one Spirit, . . . one hope of [their] calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in [them] all” (Eph. 4:4). In our own day, the theme is echoed in the Doctrine and Covenants: “be one” comes the admonition of the Lord to the Saints in Fayette, New York, who were neglecting their poor, “and if ye are not one, ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27).

Many positive consequences stem from unity. It brings with it a sense of familiarity, of safety and certainty, of belonging, and of personal worth—all of which further contribute to a sense of security and well-being. These empower us to persevere and to move comfortably, without fear, over the face of the entire planet, at least among our own. Any of us who have traveled to any extent can testify to the truthfulness of this. We literally are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints” everywhere in the world (Eph. 2:19).

That, however, is the gospel, the “good news.” There is also a potentially dark side to the same stance, especially if we are not alert to the destructive potential of this other extreme. Those who have unbalanced preferences for religious monism, like the Phar-

isees of biblical fame, frequently demonstrate tendencies toward at least two major shortcomings: (1) xenophobia, a fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers, and (2) homogeneity, an unhealthy obsession with the need for conformity (usually to their own way of thinking and performing) on the part of all within the faith.

XENOPHOBIA

One mode of unity can produce a stance that is very anti-Christian. It should be rather obvious from past performances of the covenant people (such as ancient Israel, especially the Pharisees) that strongly unified groups easily fall prey to a posture of exclusion rather than one of inclusion, a stance which is, in my view, antithetical to the mission and message of the Savior.

We all like to be thought special. We relish being among the exclusive. It sets us apart as someone distinct. It does nice things for our ego. We enjoy owning and driving exclusive cars, living in exclusive neighborhoods, joining exclusive clubs, wearing exclusive clothes—if for no other reason than that these things are associated with exclusivity. The word itself has a nice “yuppie” ring about it. It carries with it a sense of being better than others. It says *elite*; it says *important*. But at its roots, it simply says exclusion, i.e. the omission of others. And this connotation somehow seems out of sync with the cherished American ideal of democracy and the Christian concept of brotherhood.

Certainly it seems out of sync with the message which the Savior brought, of love and concern for others. One of the things that his disciples and enemies alike had a difficult time understanding was his inclusiveness: publicans, harlots, and winebibbers; Samaritan women, lepers, women taken in adultery; anxious, troublesome parents pressing for a blessing for their children, calloused soldiers nailing him to a cross—and many others that the orthodox Pharisaic leaders of the Jewish sects (and often even his own disciples) excluded from their fellowship. The Savior reached out with concern to all of them and included them as much as they would allow him. Inclusion was at the core of his good news; exclusion was opposed to his concept of love.

In the Church we sometimes unwittingly do a rather effective job of fostering xenophobia, especially in our youth, isolating the members mentally and socially from those outside the faith. The multiplication of meetings and other demands on their time is only one means of doing this. (Although I appreciate—more than I can express—the time volunteered in behalf of my children by caring individuals in my ward, I, for one, have a very difficult time understanding the thinking that suggests, as it has recently, that the answer to drug addiction, teen-age sexual promiscuity, and other problems is to institute more activities for the youth during the week.) Second, our youth are constantly taught, both at church and at home, how much better they are than those outside of the faith (or even those of earlier generations), and how what they are doing is more important than what others are doing.

We inadvertently fill their thinking with militaristic metaphors common in our teachings: they are a royal army, putting on the armor of God, warring against the forces of evil. It seemed

to me when I was growing up that we were eternally at war with someone or something and that the adoption of a military mentality was crucial to my survival. Those outside of the Church had driven and killed my ancestors, and it was only a matter of time before they would be at it again. Over and over this was presented as one of the conditions of the last days—for which days I had been reserved in heaven.

Too often we present life as if it were a matter of US against THEM (whomever they might prove to be), and in doing so we come dangerously close to creating a persecution paranoia through our teachings. Unfortunately, it is easier to unite a group *against* a person or idea than to unite them *in favor of* a great idea (as is seen in the current case of Iran's foreign policy—or American foreign policy, for that matter). Sometimes we emphasize what we are against more than what we are for.

That attitude underlies the principle of scapegoating. Every group seems to function best with a scapegoat to unite against in order to survive, or to acquire a sense of worth: the unkempt, smelly, awkward boy in the kindergarten class; the girl who wants too much to be popular in the high school; the rival high school or college; the other ward with the “dirty players” on its basketball team; the competition in business; the foreign nation, especially if it currently carries a tinge of socialism or communism of any variety.

We are constantly on the attack against someone or something. We love to unite against them. We love to hate them and to feel superior to them. We do it almost instinctively. And within the Church, it concerns me that the hatred we teach against Lucifer (and the forces of evil) is so easily transferred into hatred of those whose ideas are different from our own in any way. Isolated from others in such a manner, how can we possibly reach out to share those things that we have come as a people to cherish? Such a stance seems detrimental to the entire concept of missionary work. But equally important, how can we glean rich insights about life from others if we draw back exclusively into our own society (a point that I will return to later)?

Further, one thing that troubles me most regarding our desire for unity and exclusivity is that it encourages a smugness regarding our own endeavors and accomplishments, and a degree of apathy or even intolerance toward that which “the world” is doing: civil rights marches, peace movements, poverty programs, artistic and scholarly endeavors, etc. From an exclusionary perspective, time devoted to such interests (and they do require tremendous time commitments) is time away from the meetings and other obligations we try to equate with the building of the kingdom of God. That which WE are doing is infinitely more significant than that which THEY are doing—or thinking. That which WE have is far superior in every way to that which THEY have.

I was intrigued a few years ago by the account of one of my close friends, who is an estate planner. In the course of his business, he met a non-Mormon doctor who had moved into the inner city of Salt Lake, where he lived and worked with the poor. After a time this doctor and his wife decided to take their two children on a long-overdue vacation. At a rest stop, the couple

had watched in horror as their children, hand in hand, were hit and killed by a truck. After the funeral, the couple decided to go to India and volunteer their services to one of the programs there to help build better communities. I will never forget the frustration of my Mormon friend, and more especially of his wife, as they later held scheduled meetings with the couple to teach them the principles and ordinances of the gospel, and as the doctor tried to convince my friend that he should become involved in contributing to the work in India. I suspect I know which side of the dialogue was more important in an eternal sense, but my friend was forced to wrestle anew with the issue of who was the better Christian. Sometimes our smugness shuts our minds to the outstanding contributions that others are making to life in this world.

Xenophobia not only does damage to those outside of the system but also to us. Such a stance leads to a closing of our minds to alternative and sometimes even more meaningful options for us in life. It destroys any type of dialogue which might reveal such options. In the history of mankind, unfortunately, nothing is more readily evident than the oft-repeated tragedy of the rejection of new ideas without adequate investigation—new concepts which have later proven extremely helpful.

I wonder what our own church would look like if there had not been a religious revival at the time of Joseph Smith, if there had not been members of the Church in Kirtland who were involved in temperance societies, or if some of the Saints in Kirtland had not followed a practice of having all things in common prior to Joseph's arrival, or if the trends toward the social gospel of the late nineteenth century had not raised some vital issues—or any number of things that led Joseph and other leaders of the Church back to the Lord with more questions. Others raised the questions; the Lord provided the answers.

Having taught American religions (and to a lesser extent world religions) for some time, I am often deeply pained by the apathy—and sometimes antagonism—some of our people display when the religious beliefs of others are discussed. (This is not intended to be a blanket indictment of all, or even the majority, of students I have had.) “We have the truth,” their boredom testifies, “and what do we possibly have to learn from the beliefs of others, from the philosophies of men?”

At such times I find encouragement in some of the comments of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm yet deals justice to his neighbors and mercifully deals his substance to the poor, than the long, smoothfaced hypocrite (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 303).

Friendship is one of the grand fundamental principles of “Mormonism”; [it is designed] to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease and men to become friends and brothers (*Teachings*, p. 316).

Further, Joseph notes, it is through these friendships and sharing (often with those outside of the faith) that we come to some of those important insights in this life that make us what he called “true Mormons”:

Have the Presbyterians any truth? Yes. Have the Baptists,

Methodists, etc., any truth? Yes. They all have a little truth mixed with error. We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true “Mormons” (*Teachings*, p. 316).

Brigham Young echoed something of the same idea:

Some who call themselves Christians are very tenacious with regard to the Universalians, yet the latter possess many excellent ideas and good truths. Have the Catholics? Yes, a great many very excellent truths. Have the Protestants? Yes, from first to last. Has the infidel? Yes, he has a good deal of truth; and truth is all over the earth. . . . Do you think there is any truth in hell? Yes, a great deal, and where truth is there we calculate the Lord has a right to be (*Journal of Discourses* 12:70).

When discussing the religious beliefs of others with my students, I always consider my efforts successful when I have persuaded them that they have gained much if they have just become aware of some of the questions (never mind the answers) raised by almost all faiths. For only through identifying the right questions are we able to arrive at the right answers.

While I was doing my graduate work, which involved a number of classes in philosophy (such as existed at BYU in those days), I was often confronted by friends and relatives with the question of what I was currently studying at the university. Very quickly I came to realize that the mere mention of philosophy would inevitably raise eyebrows and trigger the next question: “What are you studying *that* for?” (read, “Why are you leaving the Church?”). After going through this catechism repeatedly, I finally found a response that satisfied me and opened the door to more meaningful dialogue with those making the inquiry (I’m not sure that the response was mine, originally): “I am discovering that philosophy has the questions and the gospel has the answers, and I am finding one almost meaningless without the other.”

Though the answer is admittedly flippant, the principle it embraces is not. There are many vital insights into the gospel that I never appreciated or even comprehended until I found others raising questions or taking a new perspective that shed light on those principles. For example, I never appreciated Paul’s (and Mormon’s) triad of faith, hope, and charity so well as I did after studying existentialism, with its emphasis on absurdity, despair, and alienation. I never found the scriptures as poignant and powerful as I did after studying the faith of others, both believers and atheists.

Therefore, xenophobia—the nemesis of pluralism—is also harmful because it prohibits us from coming to fathom ourselves and what we know. Often (if not always) we come to understand the strength of our own ideas by comparison with the ideas of others. Only through a consideration of beliefs different from our own can we really come to understand fully and define ourselves—and such questions are most commonly raised as we confront those who disagree with us (either in a friendly or antagonistic mode). Only as such questions are raised do we come to seek answers. “Why is he disagreeing with me?” “Is it possible that she is right?”

I suggest this is what Lehi’s statement concerning opposition

is all about (2 Nephi 2:11-14)—why there can be no life if there is no opposition and, by extension, why there can never be an abundance of life unless there is also an abundant variety of opinion. It is in our struggle for answers that insights and understanding occur to us. In a pluralistic society the maximum number of questions emerge.

I suspect that none of us fully comprehends ourself—what we believe and what we stand for—until we place our intellectual and spiritual values into the market place beside those of others. Even if we end up having to buy back our own from the market, we are richer for the experience. And though obviously there are also important things we learn about ourselves in isolation, I suggest that there are many more things we glean from the diversity in society, both in and out of the Church. That is why I have come to opt for a good deal of the spice of plurality along with our unity in the Church. I have come to like the idea of including, rather than excluding, and I sense that we can all gain by that inclusion.

Plurality or diversity need not necessarily be destructive or even disruptive to unity. In certain respects they appear to me an indispensable source of growth and development. Accompanied by tolerance, patience, long-suffering, meekness, gentleness, and some of the other major Christian virtues that go into the larger configuration of love, they seem the very key to an abundant life.

HOMOGENEITY

While xenophobia is a major problem in relating to those outside the faith, the insistence on rigid conformity without questioning is a major concern within. Demanding obedience to the will or ideas of others (typically to those with whom we agree) is often an easier way to create and maintain a kind of unity than is persuading people (in the spirit of the D&C 121), especially if the authority structure is as well established as it is in Mormonism. All parents know this from rearing their children. Give up your ideas, we insist; mine are better. In the process, creativity is squelched, if not destroyed. That is the tragedy of this stance.

And yet many among us resist the new ideas and insights of others who disagree, and we do it as a matter of common course. I’m sure it would not come as a great shock to those who attend Sunstone symposiums to find that their attendance is a source of discomfort for many within the Church, both at the leadership level and among the laity. People do not like to have their cherished thoughts questioned. We don’t like others rocking our boat, especially if we’ve never learned to swim.

When people in various settings within the Church begin to wrestle through the implications of a scripture or a Church program (which wrestling is far too commonly mistaken for an antagonistic attack on the cherished beliefs of the group), almost inevitably someone will try to short-circuit the discussion by an appeal to authority. In such exchanges, someone inevitably evokes a statement from an authority figure, which ostensibly closes off any further investigation—“This is the answer, and that is all we need to know about the matter.”

With this tactic, we switch tracks from one involved in thinking through an issue to one involved with recalling to mind

an authoritative statement. Plainly, the two processes are radically different, and although I sense that we should never turn our backs on the wisdom and insight of others, neither do I feel that we are ever wise in feeling that it is to our advantage for others to do our thinking for us. Perhaps one of my colleagues was right when he recently suggested that we now need a hymn titled "I Am an Adult of God."

In the chapter entitled "The Grand Inquisitor" in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, one of the brothers, a philosopher, relates a story to his brother, a Russian Orthodox priest. The backdrop for the story is the Spanish Inquisition. Into that setting the Savior comes, only to be recognized and placed under arrest and thrown into prison by order of the Grand Inquisitor—who later visits Christ in the dungeon. Obviously, the story is a rather unsettling one—an assumed servant of Christ, arresting the Savior and having him incarcerated. The reason for this action is explained, however, by the Grand Inquisitor, who expresses his (and others') disenchantment with the tenet of freedom so central to Christ's teachings: "Did you forget," the Inquisitor queries, "that a tranquil mind or even death is dearer to man than the free choice in the knowledge of good and evil?"

The truth of that observation rang clear to me the first time I read it, and I thought of it again last year when several Russian immigrants renounced American citizenship and returned to their home land. As I watched on television, I asked myself, "How could they ever give up citizenship in the U.S. to return to Russia?" Then I recalled the order and evident security I had witnessed while visiting in Moscow and Leningrad in the early 1980s. The seeming stability of the communist order was more important for them than the freedom and insecurity of life in New York.

Dostoevsky's words struck responsive chords, both in regard to the lives of others I had known and to my own. Several people I know suffer to some degree from what Walter Kaufmann has aptly termed "decidophobia." There is a certain comfort in having others responsible for important choices in our own lives. That way we win if the decision is right—and we aren't responsible if the decision is wrong. In short, we end up winning either way. The trouble is that we lose the growth and insight that accompany the stretching and frustration associated with decision making.

Coupled with this all-too-human tendency to flee responsibility, and compounding the problem even further, is our recognition that often God requires our obedience, whether we understand or not. Adam's sacrifices and Abraham's offering of Isaac are poignant examples of this. The problem is that it is difficult, at best, to know when God demands our unquestioning obedience and when he wants us to work through a problem on our own, as illustrated in Oliver Cowdery's attempt to translate the Book of Mormon (D&C 9:7-8).

Unfortunately, there are those among us who would like to assume the role of God in controlling the lives of others—unfortunately, it is the nature and disposition of *almost all* men to want to exercise unrighteous dominion over the souls of men (D&C 121:39). Frequently, that desire for dominion is not even

the consequence of the evil designs of men (to use the terminology of the Doctrine and Covenants); sometimes, as with parents, the desire is the result of frustration, or lack of patience, or simply the result of thinking that our idea is better than the ideas of others or that we are privy to some insights that others do not have. The recent Iran-Contra affair is an excellent example of that last stance.

I am constantly being told by a couple of my brethren in my high priests quorum that obedience is the first law of heaven. (That is an interesting statement for which I would like to know the reference.) Then they quote the statement from the book of Abraham which says: "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25). I have always been uncomfortable with any approach to that passage in Abraham which puts emphasis on life as a testing ground (that is, God has sent us to earth to test our faith to see if we will perform as well outside of his presence as we apparently did in his presence). I prefer to put the emphasis on the schooling experience (that is, we were sent here to learn the difference between good and evil—why one works and the other doesn't).

The two principles (obeying another blindly and researching on our own) are obviously not the same, but neither are they necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, in that passage in Abraham we are told that God is interested in seeing if we will do everything that he commands us to do. One "commandment" God has given us is to exercise our own agency in constructive ways without his having to tell us what to do, because the power is *in us* to do much good (D&C 58:26-29). That seems to be one of the most fascinating paradoxes in scripture. God tells us to do what he tells us to do—and what he tells us to do is to do things without his having to tell us what to do.

So, while it is common in Mormonism to consider life as a testing or proving ground, I think it is equally valid (and infinitely more beneficial) to think of it as a schooling place where we learn by having new experiences, by exploring ideas of our own, and thereby coming to recognize the consequences of such ideas and actions. Through this procedure we ultimately come to understand more fully the wisdom of God's laws and the reasons underlying those laws—and by understanding them to employ them more willingly with even greater faith. In fact, I prefer to think of it that way because by doing so I can embrace both of God's statements: the one in Abraham to obey and the one in the Doctrine and Covenants to work it out on my own.

CONCLUSIONS

As noted earlier, the conflict between monism and pluralism has obvious analogues in the age-old friction between liberals and conservatives, and error lies at both extremes of the spectrum. Jesus often clashed with the Pharisees, the arch conservatives of Israel, but he also rejected the doctrine of the more liberal Sadducees who readily embraced many aspects of Roman philosophy, moved freely in the company of their conquerors, and even accepted aspects of their life style. Moreover, ancient Israel's

problems in the Old Testament did not originate solely from too much exclusivity, but rather from the very opposite—from foolishly embracing the novel ways and views of the peoples among whom they lived. Perhaps the Old Testament can be viewed as a case study warning against the dangers of unrestrained pluralism, and the New Testament against excessive monism.

How much tolerance can we tolerate? I really have no resolutions to the problem, nor even any brilliant guiding principles to suggest, except perhaps to pass on one of B. H. Roberts': "Unity in the essentials, tolerance in non-essentials" (Sunstone, Dec. 1979, p. 20)—whatever that means. I suspect we would never get a total consensus on what falls neatly into either category. Judging from the ongoing, age-old battle between liberals and conservatives, I doubt that what I say will move those who have planted their minds in concrete at either end of the spectrum. What I have to offer, therefore, are simply my own feelings on the matter. These are some of the things I would like to see happen.

1. In the spirit of brotherly concern, I wish we could be a little less xenophobic and a little more ecumenical in our dialogue with other faiths. I realize that a study of other faiths can be disconcerting (and even come close to being destructive) to the faith of any who have been taught that the Church has a monopoly on all truth. Nevertheless, I believe there is a healthy way to enter into such a dialogue, and to learn from those of other persuasions, without diminishing faith in one's own religious views. In fact, I have often seen young Latter-day Saints come away from such exposure with new, exciting insights into the strength of their own position.

We need to learn that in the economy of the world there is not a fixed amount of goodness and that recognition of the accomplishments of others need not somehow diminish our own. The story of Mormonism is one of the most moving sagas in the history of the world, and we have good reason to feel pride in it, but it is one among many. Many have also been deeply moved by the spiritual quests of many of the Catholic saints, of some of the Protestant divines, of Judaism, of Gautama or Mohammed and other founders of the world's great religions, and less-heralded men and women everywhere who have sought for and found meaning in the love of God and their fellowmen.

This is not equivalent to saying that all roads lead to heaven—nor that authoritatively administered ordinances and covenants are not required, or that all churches are equal in the sight of God. But it does seem that God has prepared a standard of judgment which centers first and foremost in one's love of God and fellowman, and that the powers and ordinances of the priesthood ideally flow out of that reservoir, and not the reverse (as he tried so often to explain to wayward Israel).

2. Further (and perhaps this is simply an extension of what I have just mentioned), I would like us, through comparison with others outside the faith, to recognize our own deficiencies in areas where we are often lacking: in the arts, in dedication to scholarship, in involvement in humanitarian efforts which reach beyond the bounds of denominational concerns, to mention only a few.

Within the bounds of the Church, I would like us to be a little

more eager in our search for insights beyond those we have now acquired—that we would subject all we do to a critical scrutiny (in the best, positive sense of that word) and become creative where we can, rather than rigidly conforming to past practices without thinking and questioning. I wish we would get more involved as wards and stakes in activities that would help enrich our lives, without expecting "the Brethren" or bodies like the Correlation Committee to do all of our thinking for us. I'm not so sure but that there are many more important things we might ponder in our meetings than those we do now.

3. I wish we could be a little more expansive in our study of what Mormonism means, as revealed in our scripture and in our history. I wish we would be a little less authority-ridden in our approach to scripture and not assume we have to await definitive statements from the General Authorities before we understand what scripture is all about or what it has to say. We would do well to review, from time to time, the statement made by Joseph Smith when Pelatiah Brown was brought to trial before a High Council:

I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodist, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine (*Documentary History of the Church* 5:340).

4. I wish we would be less judgmental in our attitudes toward those in our wards and stakes who are different from us in terms of such things as lifestyles (for example, those who don't seem to fit comfortably in the mainstream of middle-class America, or who don't dress for success) and those who see things in a slightly different light—especially in the realms of politics and economics. It is their church as well, and they also should have a chance for their own positive input.

I resist any in the Church who teach that capitalism (or even Americanism) and Mormonism are synonymous, or that God is the Great Conservative (or the Great Liberal, for that matter), or that liberalism is a great delusion, or that anyone on public welfare is a lazy lout who is out to live off the hard work of the rest of us. Economics is something the Lord is obviously very concerned about (at least where it touches on the problem of wealth and poverty), and I pain inside when I see my students taking the attitude that the poor are all of a common mold, fashioned around a core of laziness. That is a good example of what I mean when I bring up the issue of conformity and its implication that everyone should be as I am.

My experience has suggested to me that most of us in the Church in the United States know very little about poverty in general, or even about the poor in the Church. In the main, in the more articulate areas of the Church, we are a church of the middle class. Far too many of us are really isolated from the poor. One of the most enlightening experiences I had in the Church occurred while I was attending school in Syracuse, New York. Syracuse at that time was about the same size as Salt Lake City, but we only had one ward. That meant that Saints from all

economic levels in the city came together in a common setting. Executives from Carrier and General Electric served as home teachers in the inner city areas where the bishop didn't even let the Relief Society teachers visit because of the high incidence of crime. (And many of those in the inner city wouldn't even come out to church because they were ashamed of their clothes and the way they were consequently treated by some of the members of the Church. That was only one of their problems—bus fare was another.) Mormonism has become a middle class or rich man's religion in our part of the world, but not in others, and I wonder if the two will ever be able to understand each other.

When we moved back to Salt Lake we lived for a couple of years in the Liberty Park area, which obviously is not inner city, but it comes closer. While living there I had occasion to speak at a few of the wards in the wealthier parts of the city, allowing me to contrast the difference in settings in which each segment worshipped. It was almost like two different churches, socially. I wondered how some of my brothers and sisters in the Liberty Park area would be looked upon by the children of my brothers and sisters in the affluent Federal Heights area, and vice versa. By virtue of the way we partition the wards geographically here in the West we often keep the rich isolated from the poor, and the poor from the rich. I'm not convinced it needs to be that way. Neither gets to see the problems nor strengths of the other.

My older children were reared in a church very different from my younger children. Because we later moved into an area of Salt Lake in which primarily older couples lived, my two older sons often had only one or two others in their priesthood quorums. When they had an MIA special occasion it was at best a visit to BYU. Their friends who had moved from the neighborhood to the suburbs in Bountiful were going to Disney World in Florida for their major yearly ward outing. I have often wondered if there is not a better way to build economic understanding and the kind of unity of the faith I sense the Savior was advocating.

Even in our work with welfare recipients we are isolated from them. When we go out to work for the poor, we go into the field or into the cannery with other middle class members of the Church. Unless we become a bishop or a Relief Society president, seldom do we ever come face to face with the problems of hard-core poverty. But so many of our young people at the university seem to think they know all about it. Again, surely there is a better way. There is a need for some good creative thinking about new ways to deal with such problems, or at least of ways to develop empathy for those suffering.

Perhaps B. H. Roberts said it best in his now-famous article which touches on discipleship:

[Mormonism] calls for thoughtful disciples who will not be content with merely repeating some of the truths, but will develop its truths; and enlarge it by that development. . . . The disciples of "Mormonism," growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; cooperating in

the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development ("Book of Mormon Translation," *The Improvement Era*, 9:712-13).

Roberts penned that in 1906, five months before James delivered the Lowell Lectures. Obviously, we have come a great distance since then. But we have even further to go, diminishing xenophobia and resisting appeals for a meaningless sense of homogeneity. Sunstone has done much to encourage this type of discipleship. That is one of the reasons I participate in the symposiums and publish in the magazine. Judging from past experience, I probably won't agree with all that is said or written in this context, nor will you; but I believe in the pluralism it promotes, and in the richness that can attend that pluralism.

EARLY MORNING IN MAPLETON, UTAH

It's cool, cold
 for June. The chill
 wakes us. I put a quilt on the bed,
 we make love, you curl
 into sleep.
 into sleep. At the window I hear
 soft conversations, trees waking,
 Color bleeds into the valley,
 you turn,
 you turn, breathe
 deeply, and resettle, the canyon
 walls are two cupped hands
 filling with milk.

Buttoning my coat I close
 the door behind me, the canyon
 breeze
 rolls off a slow
 hill of rye. I cross the road, climb
 the neighbor's gate and shake
 hands with the tall

 grass
 on the ditchbank, cows watch
 with white faces.
 At a rise in the pasture

 I turn
 to see the house, white, still,
 I think of you sleeping.
 Dew flashes

 on the grass, the back
 of my neck grows warm
 and suddenly, I feel planted.

JOHN W. SCHOUTEN