
FROM THE EDITOR

THE CHILDREN OF GOD



By Elbert Eugene Peck

AS A THIRTEEN-year old I watched the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the United Nations meetings and hoped for peace. "There won't be peace," my mother said as she ironed. "It's prophesied." That month there was a lot of talk at Church about the Jews gathering and the Second Coming. As I watched the diplomats I was sad for their heroic but hopeless efforts because I "knew" the outcome.

Recently, we have witnessed hopeful and incredible international events which lead many, including myself, to think it just might be possible to finally move, however slowly, into a period of relative peace and cooperation. If we cautiously craft the scene to reduce security fears and increase interdependent prosperity, maybe the oppressive nations will pursue that uncertain path to nonviolence and freedom. Over the centuries, the seemingly feeble works for peace have combined to incubate a climate where more and more conflicts are negotiated and human rights accepted and secured. Christianity, with its cyclical dispensations, encourages the gradual progress of humankind.

My politics come, of course, from my liberal American education, my utopianism from my Mormon-Christian tradition. So do my apocalyptic fears: Peace is an illusion; rage, cold hearts, and suspicion are the signs of our wicked day; nations will always war.

On my mission I had similar feelings about the hell-bent world and found a perplexing comfort when, in unauthorized study, I read about the early Twelve in England, their "great Babylon." The apostles were appalled by the same social turmoil and economic squalor that motivated the strong criticism of Charles Dickens and Friedrich Engels but they interpreted it as a sign of the times and falsely predicted the immediate collapse of nations and the nearness of the Judgment and Christ's return. They urged a quick warning and proselyting and a hasty return to Nauvoo.¹

Once this "last days" perspective gave me

hope and security. By focusing vision on the wrapping up of history and the Church's missionary role in publishing peace, I was and still am motivated to work to establish Zion. Now, however, I lament how the same blinders can restrict our vision and ability to be peacemakers. I know Christ's peace is inner and unknown to the world, and that his commendation of peacemakers is framed in the Beatitudes which are primarily intra- and inter-personal and not international. Nevertheless, Francis of Assisi confronting the Turk, Joseph in Pharaoh's court, and the unassuming service of Ammon to his "evil empire" are examples of how pure-hearted people can influence political affairs. God's peacemakers must include those who stop actual fighting and promote political tolerance and social tranquility.

It seems self-evident that in order to be able to earnestly labor for political peace one must truly believe that peace is practically possible and not just "theoretically possible." Often our use of prophecy prevents that. Let's leave the timing and fulfilling of prophecy to Providence. Elder Bruce R. McConkie believed that neither he nor his grandchildren would see the Millennium. He said it could be 300 years away. Who knows? The point is that a lot can happen in 300 years—perhaps even a century of international calm during which great spiritual work is done. Believing that possibility empowers us to act. Our task is to do God's work on earth which I see as the bonding of the hearts of *all* humankind, dead and living. That work includes those doctrines which have political applications, such as justice (human rights and social welfare) and peacemaking (stopping conflict).

Another limiting factor is how we see our mission to the world, which may be different for us as individuals than for the Church because God's kingdom embraces more than his Church. When we abuse the Babylon/Zion dichotomy, we place ourselves in the

polarizing position of seeing non-Mormons in the "world" as evil and ourselves as good. That purist approach embraces xenophobia and encourages the much criticized "join or get lost" member missionary approach. When dealing with sinners, Zion and Babylon must be seen as ideal types which confront each person. An Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn quote in *The Gulag Archipelago* helps me maintain that perspective:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

The Sermon on the Mount parable of the salt and savour compels us to be active in the world and helps me to constructively relate the world and the Church and me. In it, the thing that has real value is *not* the salt but the item which is salted. (When some say "the salt of the earth" they mean they're the chosen holy ones, and that's not true.) Salt merely brings out in the other items their *inherent* taste or value. If it doesn't do that it is useless. Similarly, the Church and its members are chosen to bless the world by bringing out the goodness in every person in the world. The Church does that by gathering converts to its community striving to live a celestial order. Saints grow in serving that community, but as members of the world they also have broader obligations. This perspective avoids the good/evil judging of individuals and combats parochialism by immersing us in *the world's* affairs. In truth, we only become good ourselves when we, being also evil, in love and humility serve the good in others.

It seems to me that only with the above embracing approach can we as a people fulfill the parable which follows the savourless salt: the light of the world, the city on the hill, Zion. As I ponder the immense goodness God is working in the world *outside* of Mormonism, I increasingly feel that the unique purpose for the Church is to be a central player—the ship's keel—in moving the world to a peaceful, equalitarian community. To be the catalyst which shows all that goodness in the world how to "live together in love" (D&C 42:45)—making peace, making His family on earth, heaven. ☺

1. James B. Allen and Malcom R. Thorp, "The Mission of the Twelve to England, 1840-41: Mormon Apostles and the Working Class," *BYU Studies* 15 (Summer 1975): 4, 499.

DOS AND DON'TS OF GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASSES

**DON'T READ LENGTHY SONOROUS
PASSAGES TO THE CLASS**



*"Let me share what
Mark E. Peterson wrote about this. . . ."*

DO INVITE DISCUSSION



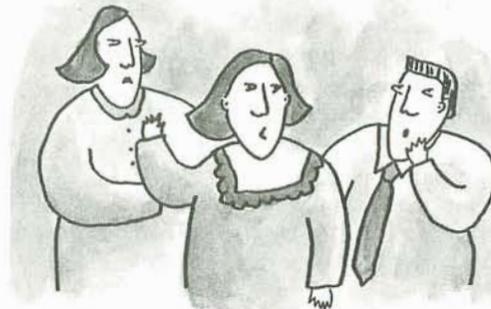
*"Debbie thinks the Ten Tribes are living under the
polar ice cap, does anyone have an idea about that?"*

**DON'T RIDE YOUR HOBBY
HORSE VERY LONG**



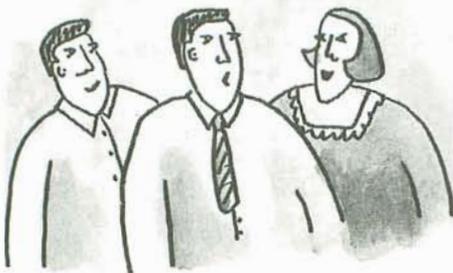
*"This week is part three of our lesson on
the importance of using formal language in prayer"*

**DON'T RELATE OBSCURE STORIES AS
COMPLICATED AS A RUSSIAN NOVEL**



*". . . and then my cousin's sister-in-law said to
her neighbor's son who she met by chance at . . ."*

**DO INJECT HUMOR INTO
BORING LESSONS**



*"If God depended on the missionaries
the Church would have died years ago."*

**DO HELP THE TEACHER BY
SHARING EXPERT KNOWLEDGE**



*"Actually, if the sun stood still in the sky
the earth would stop spinning and then everyone would fall off."*