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FROM THE EDITOR

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## AMBIVALENT AND AMBIGUOUS

By Elbert Eugene Peck



WHAT DO YOU think about George P. Lee? I feel sad. From the first news of his excommunication to my latest reevaluation based on the newest rumored report, sadness is the ever-present emotion.

Each time I read Lee's two letters to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve which he released to the press (reprinted in this issue) my thoughts and feelings are conflicted. I feel pain and empathy with Lee's alienation from his Brethren which perhaps is fundamentally cultural. Yet Lee's emphatic, almost fanatical, insistence on his Gentile/True Israel theology is too narrow for practical policy, too undemocratic for my American tastes, too literalistic with the scripture text and too lacking in deference to collective council. For me, Lee takes theology (not religion) too seriously and absolutely in a world where we glimpse God at best through contorted reflections in a dim mirror and must interpret him with our limited humanity.

I remember joyfully discussing with my mission president Elder Lee's 1975 appointment by the Lamanite Apostle now President Kimball to the First Quorum of the Seventy. The quorum had just been reorganized and now the Church was embracing ethnic diversity in its senior levels. What changes and new insights would this cultural pluralism bring? Those were hopeful days and undoubtedly Lee felt and probably was encouraged in a sense of mission for his Indian people, the children of Lehi. Nineteen years later those days now seem like the first act of a tragedy in which the hopeful scene is set, only to be

destroyed in subsequent acts by already-present, if unseen, flaws and uncontrollable circumstances.

In James Goldman's play "The Lion in Winter" the aging, imprisoned Eleanor of Aquitaine asks her estranged husband King Henry II of England at a acrid royal holiday, "How, from where we started, did we ever reach this Christmas?" Henry's severe answer: "Step by step."

The ironies in Lee's life make him a tragic figure. George Lee was the "success story" of the Church's Indian Student Placement Program where Native American children were placed in Anglo LDS homes to attend good schools and be taught Church leadership skills. Yet it seems even with his BYU doctorate in educational administration and his service as a college president, Lee did not fully comprehend his second culture and what it really meant when it told him that he and his people were special, chosen, God's.

Then, too, the preceding LDS generation probably did believe that concept more than we do today, even if they didn't act to fulfill it. (Although the "chosen" appellation always had a subtle but strong tone of condescension and the Book of Mormon preamble was used primarily as a missionary tool, not a policy guide.) Perhaps Lee felt betrayed when the culture changed, again, as it always does and will.

Understandably a General Authority with a mission for his people would feel insulted when his views were not sought out, his critiques not attended to, and his assignments

beside the point. Especially when the Indian programs were being dismantled, for whatever administrative reasons, including federal laws. Should not our theology instead of cost-benefit evaluations determine policy? he may have asked.

The Brethren's apparent frustration is understandable, too (although we know little of their side of the story). For whatever purpose Lee was called during those early days of the First Quorum, for administrative reasons the Seventies were assigned managerial roles with limited policy input (which the Twelve retained). With protests and probations, Lee apparently had unusual difficulty being a "team player" in this very American corporation. The composition of his undiplomatic hand-written letters shows that he had almost no sense of how the apostles would respond to his attacks. He was an outsider and didn't know how to play the game.

I imagine that as Lee's frustration became more hostile and his doctrine more insistent the Brethren took their action with great prayerful reluctance and, as I'm sure it seemed to them (but not to Lee), long-suffering and patience—each side seeing the futility of continued affiliation, as both Lee's letter and the Twelve's action affirm. Lee's beliefs probably do constitute apostasy as defined in the 1989 *General Handbook of Instructions* (those who "persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine after being corrected by their bishops or higher authority" [p. 10-3]). But were his ideas any more screwy than Alvin R. Dyer's eccentric global racial theology? No. Dyer, too, was controversial among his Brethren but had the favor of President McKay and in most other ways fit in with the G.A. culture. When B.H. Roberts, undeniably a proud, strong-willed man, confronted his famous long-night dilemma of bending to the Brethren or departure, he bent. Lee did not. Why? I suspect Lee's unwillingness to accept correction has a lot to do with it, also Roberts had social/family ties to the hierarchy which Lee lacked. Lee's primary ties are to his people (he has now been asked to run for president of the Navajo Nation). Perhaps an illustrative fact is that Lee lived on the depressed West Side of Salt Lake Valley and not in the affluent East Bench neighborhoods where most Church leaders reside.

In my best moments, I hope this incident is just one of our many lamentable growing pains as we unavoidably step-by-step become an international church and learn to embrace other cultures. Deep down I really believe that, but in my more depressing moments I fear

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that we may be unknowingly walking step by step away from Zion; I fear that our structure is too rigid and that cosmetic institutional reforms would not change our cultural suicide. Fortunately, by nature I am optimistic, which keeps my sadness from turning into permanent pessimism. I also genuinely feel that God is sustaining this latter-day work, which when it triumphs will truly be a marvel.

In a discussion about the Church's apparent lack of success among the North American Indians in spite of its sizeable investment of resources (which fact has reportedly led some General Authorities to speculate that they are not of the seed of Lehi like the supposedly more receptive South American Indians), one BYU professor replied: "That only demonstrates our glaring inability to translate Mormonism to non-American cultures. We've worked with the Indians for over a century—more than any other culture—and we still don't know how to minister to *them* without requiring that they recreate into our image." The crucial lesson of the George Lee story may be the futility of trying to remake other cultures into our questionable American model and in learning how to embrace diverse cultural perspectives in all levels of the kingdom. By chance, the importance of finally learning that lesson is emphasized also in this issue in David Knowlton's report on the increasing attacks against the Church and the assassination of our missionaries in Bolivia, yet another challenging culture. ☐

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## TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

Janet W. Tarjan

### REFLECTIONS ON "AN ADDRESS TO MOTHERS IN ZION"



BRANT DAV

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#### THE BODY OF CHRIST

It is not for sale: this perfection. Unlike the shroud of Turin, it withstands the handling of men. It no longer says *noli me tangere*, inviting all to feel its wounds for themselves. Some believe it is passed on Sunday plates, leaving a sweet taste on the tongue. Perhaps the priests are drunk with blood—enough of that cup can set anyone free. Still we pay the doctors, lawyers and preachers to protect us from evil. They profess to be members of Christ's body, and they are wanted. Who else would pay for the wood and nails?

—TIMOTHY LIU

I HAVE THOUGHT and felt a lot about President Benson's advice and admonitions to the women of the Church in the 1987 fire-side for parents. I have listened to friends whose comments ranged from anger and hurt to, "Oh, I can't believe he really meant it the way he said it," to, "Well, it's okay for women to work if they *have* to but definitely *not* otherwise!"

This last reaction is the one that worries me. Who is to decide who "has to" or "doesn't have to" work? Is President Benson giving advice or issuing a commandment for women to return to the homes? Will this issue become

a test of faith? Does it mean that women at home are "faithful" while women who work aren't; that "faithful" women are those who do not postpone or limit their families? What does this imply about women who do plan their families?

Unfortunately, we frequently fall into the trap of judging one another by using easily observed behaviors such as smoking, drinking, or choice of attire. Will we now use working or not working, having many children close together or having few or even no children as criteria to judge worthiness, faithfulness, or spirituality?

This talk has caused pain to a lot of women. Many feel inferior, unworthy, and confused. More upsetting is the fact that many young women will make poor marriage and career decisions based on the counsel given

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in that fireside—decisions that will be detrimental to their own development. There are bound to be painful repercussions from such decisions. Let me illustrate with examples from the lives of four LDS women I have known and have grown close to.

**D**URING the past six years I have been a private tutor and have taught math at the university and community college levels. I have met reentry women who have bared their souls to me. I was someone they could talk to without fear of repercussions or rejection. It is from their experiences that I have developed such strong opinions about this subject.

One woman has two children. She does child care in her home to supplement her husband's income. She does not seem to enjoy caring for children, although she is very kind to them. Her husband works outside the home seven days a week. She has problems with depression but tries to maintain a positive outlook on life. She did not attend the 1987 parents' fireside, but her husband did. He came home after the fireside and announced that they should have more children. She was not happy about the idea, but is now expecting her third child. She gets extremely ill during pregnancy and lost seven pounds in two weeks from an already-slender frame. She appears to be unhappy. I worry about her, and I worry about her children.

Another friend married a man in his early twenties who could not read. He was unprepared emotionally and economically to provide for a family. In five years they had five children. He gambled extensively and sometimes spent the food money at local card rooms. During the first couple of years of marriage, she supported the family, but when the third pregnancy yielded twins she gave up and they went on welfare. When the twins were a year old, the father abandoned the family. The mother began attending the community college where I teach and began to see possibilities for her future. Meanwhile, the father returned. In true forgiveness, she welcomed him home and encouraged him to take advantage of the opportunities for adult remedial education at the community college. Within days she was pregnant with her fifth child and he had returned to gambling with their welfare money. She was determined to finish her one-year certificate program. She made the dean's list both semesters with straight A's. One month after earning her certificate, she gave birth.

I asked her at one point why she had mar-

ried him. She had met him in a single adult ward in Salt Lake City. She was trying hard to follow the Church's teachings. At the age of 18, she was working full-time when he proposed to her. It seemed to her that it was the logical decision to make. They had dated for a few months and were both active in the Church. They were married in the temple. He was excommunicated during her first pregnancy for adultery, but she welcomed him back. She is a bright, positive person who did not have the necessary courage, wisdom, or self-esteem to say no to a marriage proposal. She now looks upon the whole experience as a big mistake. A few months ago she took her five children and left home to start a new life in another state. Her children are now five, four, three-year-old twins, and nearly one. She is twenty-four.

I was eighteen when President Kimball gave the address referred to by President Benson in his remarks. I remember the message as being "live up to your potential." Bright, witty, capable Sister Kimball was certainly an example to us. I remember that we were told to plan for careers, to learn, and to remain active. I remember the talk being inspiring and uplifting—not restrictive. Now, I wonder about the eighteen-year-olds of today who hear the message that independence is the "world's way" for women, not the Lord's way. Why invest in an education? Why study? Why choose interests and pursue them when life is meant to be spent making beds and feeding others? Why plan for a meaningful career when in a few short years or months motherhood will overtake all aspects of a young woman's life? I feel that the messages "do not postpone families" and "do not limit families" are potentially dangerous. Why must a relationship be built on dependence and economic need rather than on independence and mutual respect?

Another woman was married to an alcoholic for seven years. She was anorexic with five children. One day she woke up to find herself unable to move, talk, or get out of bed and had to be carried to the doctor. Finally, a long road to recovery began. Three years later, now divorced and in school, she has gained weight and holds a temple recommend for the first time in her life, attending regularly. She is now more independent and happier than she ever dreamed possible, but the healing process has only begun.

The last woman's husband has a severe gambling problem and has been very selfish throughout their marriage. She is now in the difficult process of divorce. Luckily, she can support herself and her young children by

substitute teaching. Though still emotionally distraught, she feels in control of her future. Despite her problems, this woman has a much higher level of self-esteem than the others I've mentioned. She has a bright future, largely because of her education and preparation for a career.

**I** wonder what decisions my two daughters will make and how they will view their working mother as they become old enough to understand the messages from the pulpit. Some of the messages cause feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and defensiveness.

I think of the times in my life that I have felt these feelings. My husband, John, and I were in graduate school with many single men, some married men who had full-time wives at home, and a few single women. Once I made the comment to a fellow graduate student about poor John—"He sure puts up with a lot having me in school, too!" My friend (non-LDS) countered with a lecture about how lucky John was to be married to me and how he hoped to be in a similar situation himself some day. He explained that within his circle of friends, it was the rule rather than the exception for one's spouse to be in school also.

While tutoring in my home I once lamented that my daughter didn't have 100 percent of her mom's attention every day because I tutored. The woman I was tutoring at the time let me know in no uncertain terms that she did not feel at all deprived by having had a working mother. On the contrary, she was grateful for the responsibility and independence it had taught her.

When I think of the time that some "non-working" mothers spend on crafts, shopping, watching TV, or in other activities, it helps me to feel less guilty. One friend is the mother of five children and very proud to be "at home." She once described a typical day as sewing at home from 6 A.M. to 11 P.M. for a crafts store while the children fend for themselves. She becomes annoyed when they interrupt her projects.

However, she does not consider her activities to be "work" because it is done at home!

**M**UCH has been said of the husband's role as a provider. The many benefits men derive from work and careers have likewise been emphasized. I feel that there are also reasons why women should work. Although in some ways I felt forced into the job market, there are three reasons I choose to work outside the home as well as unexpected payoffs.

The first reason is to satisfy my husband. While I was at home, I was viewed as not pulling my own weight. I am a delightfully fun mom, but I am not a good housekeeper or regular mealtime observer.

The second is both personal and profound. My mother and other close relatives have had severe problems with depression. I hope that by working outside of the home throughout my life, I'll be better able to keep in touch with my feelings and maintain a sense of control over my life and my future.

The third reason is to be an example. I hope my daughters will realize as they are growing up that *they can do anything*. I hope that they find careers they like as well as I like mine, careers inside or outside of the home. And, I hope they find husbands willing to support and encourage them as they pursue their dreams.

A big payoff of working is the unexpected boost to my self-esteem. It is thrilling to make a meaningful contribution to society. In addition to teaching valuable math skills, I am able to help improve people's attitudes toward math, toward women, and toward women in math. It is also thrilling for me to receive a paycheck and to know that my efforts are acknowledged. Now that I am contributing significantly to our family income, I have found myself choosing how to spend money without feeling indebted.

Another payoff is the establishment of my own identity. I am Janet Walker Tarjan at work. I am me. I make my mistakes and experience my successes. I am not known only as someone's wife or someone's mother.

I enjoy meeting and conversing with others at social gatherings much more. When I was a full-time homemaker, we often went to gatherings related to John's work. People were usually pleasant but after asking me how old my daughter was, conversation stopped, and they would politely excuse themselves to get more food. I was perceived solely as a homemaker with nothing interesting to say. Now, as a professional, my views are sought. In addition, when I am introduced as a math professor, lively conversations begin. People are eager to share their experiences in high school or college math classes—whether good or bad. Social events are much more enjoyable for me now.

The next payoff is extremely valuable to me. I have always been a worrier. As a house-mom I worried about kidnappers, burglars, fires, broken arms, broken legs, illness, fevers, husband getting hurt or abandoning us, divorce, car accidents, plane crashes, and hijackings—everything. Amazingly, after

working full time for four or five months, I noticed that I hadn't been fearful for a long time. I still have concerns at a reasonable level—enough to make wise choices—but I no longer feel that unreasonable, debilitating fear. Some may suggest that I am "too busy to worry" now, but it is more than that. I am free from worry and fear and guilt because I am in control of my life. I am no longer solely at my husband's or fate's mercy.

The last payoff has more to do with the other members of my family than with me. My children relate well to their father; he is a real person to them. I leave early in the morning, and John does the early morning routine and does it well. We share the time with the children after school. Lately he has been teaching at night so many nights are mine alone with the children. They have a parent at home with them all but a few waking hours each day. Other than school time, our first-grader is only scheduled to be away from a parent about three hours a week. I am the co-leader for her Girl Scout Brownie troop. Our two-year-old spends three or four waking hours with playmates in child care daily. Admittedly we have a good situation. However, as perfect as it feels to us, it may not be acceptable by the standards presented in the parenting fireside.

I do not want to suggest that all women should work outside the home. I have a friend who thinks the advice to stay at home has improved her family life 100 percent. The children are doing whole grade levels better in school. The husband/father is tired from working an extra job, but on the whole their lives have improved. I suggest that whether a woman works outside or inside the home ought to be a decision made by the people affected by the decision. Young women should be encouraged to prepare for interesting and well-paying careers. They should learn to identify their own interests and abilities at early ages. Choices such as family size, or the spacing of children, ought to be left to the parents.

I want fatherhood to be a nurturing occupation. I hope that husbands, as well as wives, will make the home a haven from the world's troubles for their families. Young men should be trained to nurture as well as to provide.

I want happiness to reign in our homes whether children are raised by one parent, two parents, or grandparents. I want happiness in the homes of single people and childless people. "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy." I have always felt that this scripture applies equally to men and women. ☺

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