

# SUNSTONE

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## READERS FORUM

### MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

I AM CONCERNED with Janet Tarjan's comments in "Reflections on 'An Address to Mothers in Zion'" (SUNSTONE 13:4).

There are, in fact, far too many sisters working out in this world that should be home—women whose only reason for being away from home and family is to put that extra car in the garage, or remodel a swimming pool in the backyard, etc. There are those of us who would love to stay home, but due to inadequate income to house, feed, and clothe, must work.

The point Tarjan seems to miss, which has always been emphasized, is: Go to the Lord with your decision and if it be right you will know. That is the bottom line. Why bring up stories of women who have made the same mistake a lot of us have made as examples of excuses for the bottom line of President Benson's message. Yes, women should be home, just as the prophet of the Lord says, but we each live individual lives and must, as part of this life's probation, make decisions about what we do. Only then are we accountable to the Lord. Tarjan seems to make much ado about nothing just to make herself heard. After being a single parent for nine-and-a-half years, I've also heard many "war" stories that would make your hair curl.

Sisters, pray, make your decisions, pray again, and listen for the answers. Follow the Spirit's whisperings, then even when things go awry as they sometimes do, you will know your decision was right, and it will give you strength.

CAROLYN JAYNE  
Roseville, CA

### THE COLD GRIP OF BUREAUCRACY

I WAS ASTONDED by J. Frederick Voros's article "Do You Still Believe in Magic?" (SUNSTONE 13:4). As a part of the "Woodstock Generation," I have felt the same frustrations.

With a strong testimony, I went as a missionary to proclaim the message that God's church would provide peace on earth and look after the welfare of all God's children.

Since my motivation was primarily my love for humanity rather than a response to social or parental pressure, I was able to be, I think, an exemplary missionary. There were at the time many untruths existing within the framework of the Church, but I saw these as peripheral issues, and I viewed the First Presidency pronouncements relating to all worthy males receiving the priesthood and the Church's stand regarding the MX missile as vindications of my viewpoint.

In the ensuing fifteen years, however, what I have seen is not an increased acceptance within the Church of divergent lifestyles and opinions but rather an increased regimentation and expectation of confirmation to the corporate norm. We were told that we didn't need innovation, but rather diligence. Voros's parroting of this idea, encouraging us to plod along in faith, is a conclusion with which I cannot agree. Faith without works is dead! If innovation will not be accepted within the Church, then solutions to the world's problems (both temporal and spiritual) will come from outside the Church as intelligent, caring people leave the Church and focus their energies elsewhere. We should have the strength to live our convictions and expect our leaders to do likewise. Love and fellowship are fading beneath the cold grip of bureaucracy and statistics.

There's so much time to make up everywhere you turn.

Time we have wasted on the way.  
Yes, I do believe in magic.

KEVIN Z. DAWSON  
Willow Springs, Mo.

### A LAMANITE VOICE

DESPITE A FEAR of being typed "ethnocentric," it seems important that Lamanite voices respond to George P. Lee's letters and excommunication (SUNSTONE 13:4).

Though Lee and I don't agree on all points, I do not read the letters as "undiplomatic" as did SUNSTONE editor Elbert Peck. Given the repetition, errors, and holographic nature of the letters, we may presume that Lee wrote each in one sitting and without editing; it is easy for me to credit Lee with focusing more on the Spirit's aid in expressing a critical concern and a sense of timeliness rather than producing a perfect document. This may be

a real point of cultural conflict. In non-ecclesiastical areas I have learned that typed letters are more likely to receive greater deference and attention. Like Lee, I do not always bend to this Anglo convention. Perhaps Peck should have chosen the term "unsophisticated" to describe the letters.

The introductory paragraphs of each letter are indicative of how rooted Lee is in the Book of Mormon. I cannot view his phrasing as accidental. His precedent is found in Samuel the Lamanite's mission to the Nephites (which was omitted from the golden plates until the Savior commanded its addition) and Captain Moroni's epistle to Pahoran (a fortunate example in which areas of responsibility, levels of authority, and unwarranted chastisement were overlooked in order to work a solution). Further, the construction is extremely reminiscent of techniques taught missionaries: Lee declares his credentials and asks his audience to be receptive to the Spirit. In any event, the readers/listeners are advised that tough issues and questions will follow.

Lee's questions and statements deal with the following general categories: Church policy toward American Indians; Lamanites in the Book of Mormon; Lee and the Brethren;

policies toward the Islanders; racism versus Christianity; Lamanite alienation; policy and procedure in administration and Church courts; and a warning voice. I will not trace each point from his letters but instead will attempt to stay within general categories.

The policy concerns brought forth concerning American Indians and Islanders are extremely disturbing. As an American of Mexican descent, I am immediately concerned for the welfare of Lamanites in South and Central America, as well as other Lamanites in the States. However, having worked in the past with a ward responsible for convert Laotian refugees, I find my concerns not limited to my race. Back then I wondered why geography should assign the stake's poorest ward with the fewest active members this responsibility. My questions, like Lee's, point to a fear of institutional racism in the kingdom of God on earth and in the distribution of tithes and offerings.

Quite honestly, I find Lee's distinction of true and adopted Israel accurate. I do not, however, insist on the point of tribal responsibility so strongly, though I would like to hear a more detailed explanation of his doctrinal belief. The main stem of Lee's grievance, it

seems, is that many patriarchs are by tradition or racism failing to assign members of color to the tribe of Ephraim. (Incidentally, my blessing states that I am a descendent of Ephraim. During my mission, though, a patriarch was surprised at this and said he thought I would be from Manasseh. Ironically, my Anglo companion was assigned to the tribe of Manasseh. Needless to say, the patriarch was doubly provoked.) Again, we see institutional racism moving into spiritual realms. It should not be so difficult for Anglo readers to see why this is so disturbing to Lee or me.

Lee's relationship with the Brethren is beyond our present comprehension because so much information is withheld. Even Lee's letters do not discuss specific problems involved in "execut[ing] all [his] assignments." I must, however, contend with Peck's assertion that Lee "was an outsider and didn't know how to play the game." By virtue of his call as a General Authority, Lee was an insider, but he didn't know or wasn't trained properly for the game. The difference I am noting is much deeper than semantics. If it is simply a matter of training, then the General Authorities missed the opportunity to be "nursing fathers." But perhaps the rules to the game



changed and that is why Lee is no longer a Lamanite success story. Peck and I suggest that cronyism does exist in Church leadership. What Lee learned in seminary, at BYU, during his mission, and years of Church service no longer was as important as whom he knew.

In general, I find that Lee's complaints and questions point to his warning which does have scriptural reference. Peck and I suspect the problem is more encompassing than race; Peck has a more optimistic nature than I. Very bluntly: is the kingdom of God on earth still ruled by the Spirit of God or are we increasingly resembling other man-made institutions? This question is more distressing to me than any historic, theological, or intellectual disturbances that periodically confront my faith. Rightly so. As a convert and returned missionary, I know the leap of faith into the baptismal font is an act of exuberant optimism. The leap becomes an unending fall if we lose Daniel's wonderful vision of the Church in latter days or if our own ability to discern the Spirit is called into question. As yet I still hope but, like Lee, find the struggle and wait extremely difficult.

Having written this much I realize the difficulty Lee had in restraining his letters. I would like to deviate slightly here. In too many Sunday School classes I have heard members question how well the Lord chose his original twelve apostles. The response of the apostles when Christ reveals that one of them will betray him, however, vindicates his choice. Each apostle is introspective and asks, "Is it I?" I think, ultimately, Lee's excommunication and letters show that the current Church as a whole is dangerously lacking in self-examination and communication. I still hope for a continual exercise of this specific change in myself and the Church.

RUTH A. RODRIGUEZ  
Turlock, CA

## FREE AT LAST

THE EDITORIAL IN the August issue (SUNSTONE 13:4) was an interesting balance between finding fault with the Church and blaming George P. Lee.

Once you understand that the Church is not what it claims to be, you can relax and enjoy the spectacle. The Church is not some titanic struggle with eternal consequences. It is just one more man-made religious organization reflecting the stress of change. It is not just the culture of the Church which changes.

Everything changes that can change—the doctrines, the scriptures, the theology, the organization, etc., etc., etc.

It is not just that we "glimpse God at best through contorted reflections in a dim mirror and must interpret him with our limited humanity," but it is that we can live our whole life as a temple Mormon and never even glimpse God either in this life or the one to come. We simply become too sure of what we know to be open to even perfectly clear reflections if they are inconsistent with that "sure" knowledge. This is not a unique criticism of Mormonism; it is equally true of most religions and cultures.

Truth becomes what feels good to us without any real evaluation of why it feels good. And armed with our truth, we set ourselves apart from those who are different, secure in our superiority and uniqueness.

Poor Brother Lee. The Church corrupted him with its vision of the truth and then abandoned him when he tried to use it to save/help his people. It will be difficult for him not to be bitter and to not waste his time trying to vindicate himself.

Free at last, free at last.

WALTER L. WILLIAMSON  
Atlanta, Ga.

## THE DEVIL AND DANIEL VOGEL

DAN VOGEL does not appreciate a compliment. In his recent letter (SUNSTONE 13:4) he attacks what I considered a generous review of his work on seekers. It appears I need to be more blunt to defend myself. Vogel's book is completely ignorant of a vast body of standard scholarship and of primary sources on certain subjects he addresses. I mentioned a few of these in my book review (SUNSTONE 13:3).

I propose a challenge to Vogel here in which every SUNSTONE reader may judge the validity of Vogel's arguments and historical claims. For the sake of space, I limit my comments to one issue: Vogel's claims that the Book of Mormon doctrine of innate depravity clearly reflects Calvinist views of innate depravity—that human beings are naturally evil due to the fall. In my review, I contended that the Book of Mormon was completely Arminian and that innate depravity was also a doctrine espoused by conservative Arminians. He responded that the Arminians must have borrowed their belief of innate depravity from Calvinists. As usual, when Vogel makes

any statement on this subject (either in his book or letter) he invariably demonstrates an inaccurate and shallow understanding:

1. Arminianism is not the opposite of Calvinism (as Vogel seems to think). Arminianism was a reaction against Calvinism. It could contain either negative or positive views of human nature. The persistent difference between the two was in the notion of freedom versus determinism.

2. The view of innate depravity was widely held as a central part of many early nineteenth century Arminian views among Free Will Baptists, Episcopalians, and Methodists. Certainly, there were also more liberal Arminians who held a positive view of human nature. But let me focus on the more conservative Arminianism of early American Methodist theology. Prior to the coming of New Lights in the 1830s, nearly every Methodist Arminian statement on human nature included a statement advocating complete human depravity: Because of the fall, human beings have become incapable of doing good. Humans cannot even choose or desire good. We are God's enemy and rebels to righteousness. In 1817 William Phoebus summarized the conservative Arminian position held by early American Methodists—"total depravity; no good in man by nature . . . no good desire at all." He then confidently states that this form of Arminianism was "approved by all our ministers." In 1813, Jonathan Crowther also summarized many other Methodist Arminian statements, "man in his natural state is altogether corrupt, through all the faculties of his soul."

But if humans were so corrupt how could conservative Arminians like Methodists believe in freedom? At birth they claimed that the "light of Christ" (prevenient grace from God) is infused into every natural man so as to place him in a position of choice. All good comes from God—even freedom. This grace is given to every person because of the Atonement. Yet even with the light of Christ, the natural man was typically described as carnal, sensual, and inclined continually to wickedness. In these notions of freedom, conservative Arminians disagreed with old school Calvinists who denied freedom, with liberal Arminians and Scottish philosophers who believed in innate freedom, and with Hopkinsonian Calvinists who believed "freedom" was a mere selection process in a strictly deterministic world. The notions that humans are totally corrupt and yet receive freedom to choose good through the Atonement is a hallmark of conservative Arminianism in the early nineteenth century. In II Nephi 2 and

elsewhere in the Book of Mormon we find the conservative Arminian position stated in terms of depravity and freedom through the Atonement: "all men . . . were lost, because of the transgression of their parents. . . . And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever" (vv. 21, 26).

3. The doctrine of election in the Book of Mormon also matches conservative Arminianism. Old school Calvinists taught that God arbitrarily or mysteriously chose certain persons to be saved and certain other persons to be damned. It had nothing to do with earned righteousness. Conservative Arminians taught that salvation was based on righteousness; but God foresaw before the foundations of the world who would be righteous and hence knew from the foundation of the world who would be saved. For most Calvinists, God caused the elect to be elect. For Conservative Arminians, God knew who the elect would be. For the latter, election consists in this: conformity to the faith and righteousness of God. In Alma 31, the Calvinist notion of election as arbitrary selection is denounced in the story of the Zoramites. In the Words of Mormon, we read how "the Lord knoweth all things which are to come" (v. 7). In Alma 13, we find that God knew before the foundation of the world who would choose righteousness and therefore who would receive and be worthy of the priesthood. A sample of a conservative Arminian notion of elections that the Book of Mormon follows can be found in the 1817 book by Nathan Bangs, an early Methodist thinker. There are many other areas where I could compare Arminianism and Calvinism. In each case, whether on justification, sanctification, or those who die without law, the Book of Mormon always takes the conservative Arminian position.

4. Dan Vogel describes the above conservative Arminianism in the Book of Mormon as a mixture of Arminianism and Calvinism. He states that depravity is an exclusive doctrine to Calvinism and any Arminian who held to a notion of depravity borrowed it from Calvinism. His only evidence is from two statements—a vague one-liner from Sidney Gilbert and a late, out-of-context, apologetic one-liner from Joseph Smith. Neither statement demonstrates anything on this subject. In this assertion Vogel displays complete ignorance of a large and well documented body of research which unanimously states that Vogel is wrong. I do not know a single expert in the area who would not find Vogel's statements shallow. The great Sydney Ahlstrom in his acclaimed two volume work, *The Religions of the Ameri-*

*can People*, describes the theology of early Methodism (including complete depravity) and calls it "forcefully Arminian." Scott in his groundbreaking thesis and articles on early American Methodist theology, also describes its notions of depravity as "Arminian." Both John Wesley and Nathan Bangs state that conservative Arminianism (including depravity) were derived from the original writing of Arminius. A host of scholarly works agree that conservative Arminian notions derive from Arminius, himself.

Vogel's unfounded assertion that depravity proves the presence of Calvinism is contradicted by dozens of scholarly works on the subject and by literally hundreds of primary documents including sermons of bishops, circuit riders, diaries, magazines, and many books in the early nineteenth century. As far as I can tell, the verdict in both primary and serious secondary works outside Mormonism stands 100 percent against Vogel. Against this mountain of evidence, Vogel has produced not a single piece of primary evidence to support his notion that depravity proves the presence of Calvinism. Yet he dogmatically and repeatedly asserts it.

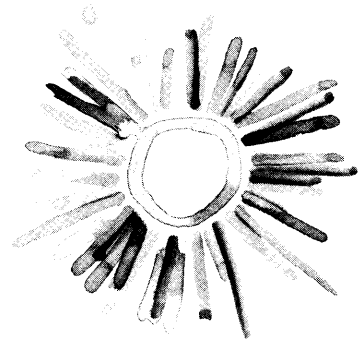
In this letter I have been forced to summarize one small area in one small subject. I have done this in order to demonstrate clearly that Vogel on this (and other topics) steps beyond his level of competence in his book on seekers. In fact, in the numerous places where he discusses this particular issue of Arminianism versus Calvinism, he always gives us either a half-truth or an outright falsehood.

Based on this discussion, Marvin Hill's assertion that early Mormonism was a mediation between Arminianism and Calvinism must be modified as follows: Calvinism and Arminianism in the first half of the early nineteenth century were both being modified to include increasingly optimistic views of human nature. These were not static but evolutionary views in Mormonism and other major religions. The Book of Mormon reflects a popular conservative Arminian position prior to 1830. This position claimed to be true to original Arminianism. This conservative Arminianism (whether in Mormonism or any other religion) was a mediation between liberal Arminianism (with its optimistic view of human nature) and Calvinism (with its pessimistic view of human nature).

MARK THOMAS  
Bothell, WA

## FROM THE EDITOR

# EQUALITY AND THE DIVERSITY OF GIFTS



By Elbert Eugene Peck

AFTER THE ANNOUNCEMENT was made that in the United States and Canada ward and stake expenses would be paid out of the general tithing funds, one friend said, "I think the Millennium is near"; another said, "the Church must be rich." I hope and suspect that the truth lies more with the Brethren's concern that the Church's equal demands on wards and individuals put a harder, and perhaps unfair, financial burden on the poor than the rich. (In taxation a flat-rate tax is "regressive" because its incidence diminishes the poor's living income but the rich's surplus, a graduated income tax is "progressive" because the percentage paid rises with the ability to pay or level of income.) A couple of years ago when my bishop presented the ward budget in priesthood meeting, Apostle David Haight, a member of the ward, stood up and expressed his surprise at the budget's large sum—especially the stake assessment—and spoke for some time on how the Church leaders are very concerned that we don't get to the situation where a person has to be wealthy to be a good Mormon. Considering this recent announcement and the similar several-year-old one on building funds (keyed to a percentage of full tithe-payers), it appears the Brethren are taking Moroni's warning seriously:

I know your doing. . . . For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor (Mormon 8:35, 37).

Clearly, these combined actions increase the redistribution of tithes from the rich to the poor. Not only to Third World countries as before but now also to the U.S. poor, as God outlined: "I will consecrate the riches of those who embrace my gospel . . . unto the poor of my people" (D&C 42:39). As much as political conservatives dislike redistributive social and income programs, the motivating principle behind them is core to God's economy of blessings: equality means that all have "equal claims on the properties" (D&C 82:17).

Implicit in this discussion of poor and rich full tithe-payers is the acknowledgment that God does *not* directly bless all individual full tithe-payers with equal material blessings, in spite of missionary discussion promises and manuals to the contrary. Not only is this a fact but it is also desirable. The Lord's own decreed way "to provide for my saints,"—"that the poor shall be exalted"—requires that "the rich are made low" (D&C 104:16). We forget that much of God's covenant (and blessing) is with us as a *people* and not just as individuals, a point we collectively affirm in the temple ceremony and each Sunday as fifty-joined members of the body of Christ at the sacrament altar. He gives to each member different gifts—including the gifts of wealth and financial acumen—and each in turn blesses the community by multiplying and sharing their particular talents and gifts. Hence, at least in part, the law of tithing's irrevocable promise to open the windows of heaven is accomplished collectively. Additionally, this must be so since God's blessings are usually bestowed indirectly through other people.<sup>1</sup> When the Book of Mormon authors celebrate the bountiful material blessings God bestowed on his righteous people, it is a wealth that is *shared* by everyone and void of vanity possessions. Similarly, the same authors condemn unshared individual wealth, which does not come to all equally, which divides society into classes and "isms," and which grinds riches in the faces of the poor.

In this communal respect, our contemporary obsession for "self reliance" in the six welfare areas<sup>2</sup> has the danger of becoming a selfish reliance if it is not put in the larger perspective of interdependent service—"every man seeking the interest of his neighbor" (D&C 82:19). True self reliance is but the acquiring and use of the skills necessary to properly manage our stewardship—all our time, talents, and money—so that we not only provide for our just wants and needs *but also* husband our resources to create a generous surplus to bless others and to establish the

poor in self-sustaining vocations. I hope that someday ample financial surpluses from our rich will be channeled through the fast offering system (which potentially affords a progressive tax aspect to Church donations) to allow bishops and Welfare Services to do what is really essential to set up our poor in self-sustaining occupations—educational subsidies. After all, it is the Church which is supposed to be self-reliant—to "stand independent" (D&C 78:14)—not each member in it.

Only collectively are we the body of Christ, jointly possessing all the Christian spiritual gifts held by various members (1 Corinthians 12). And although individuals should seek to multiply their inventory of good gifts and grow spiritually, it is dangerous and wrong for Saints to naively assume that they should possess all the gifts themselves; if they try, eventually they'll obtain only disappointment, feelings of inadequacy, and spiritual depression. Christ-like perfection for us cannot realistically mean that every member is expected to acquire each of His gifts and abilities, that is humanly impossible. Harm, too, is done to the community by the single quest for individual autonomy. By spreading the gifts diversely, God forces us to humbly turn to others, and them to us, to be complete, binding us together, making us both giver and receiver, and, as noted in the First Presidency's ward financing announcement, "both the needy and those who give" are blessed.<sup>3</sup> We need to learn how to better value and cultivate the gifts of others without devaluing our own worth and contributions. No wonder charity is the most excellent gift we all should seek, where we celebrate the gifts in others and patiently endure and lovingly compensate for their deficits.

Since we all need to give and receive, we must craft our Church culture to make both acts legitimate; to remove the judgment and humiliation which causes us to hide our social and emotional inadequacies, alienating us from gifted others. For those who must always receive much, such as the physically and mentally challenged, we must particularly take care to identify their gifts and create opportunities for them to bless the community their gifts, helping them in fact to be contributing members of the body.

Considering the dynamics of diverse gifts, it is sad when our correlated curriculum tells each of us to be and do the same things. Of course many things taught are basic gospel principles which sustain diverse Christian living, but there is also an undeniable implication (with occasional social coercion) that there is one way everyone should live as Mor-

mons. And when that sameness becomes the standard we get dysfunctional results. (Interestingly, in the temple creation narrative God places high value on variety.) God's equality and fairness comes as the result of very different saints freely sharing in common the blessed gifts of all, not from a uniform bureaucratic rule which stifles individuality, demands unrealistic achievements, and frustrates the soul.

Historically, in this dispensation, after previous open-ended experiments created virtually no surplus to redistribute to the poor, tithing was introduced as the *minimum* level of material consecration from stewardships.<sup>4</sup> With the recent changes where the Church avoids adorning the chapels and transfers more tithing funds to poorer wards, perhaps the Church is one step in front of the Saints who are still struggling with the fit of their costly apparel in the slow march to Zion where there will be no poor among us—in spirit or income. ☐

## NOTES

1. Spencer W. Kimball's famous quote: "God does notice us, and he watches over us. But it is usually through another person that he meets our needs." "Small Acts of Service," *Ensign*, December 1974, 5.

2. The Personal and Family Preparedness Standards are: literacy and education; career development; financial and resource management; home production and storage; physical health; social-emotional and spiritual strength.

3. *Church News*, "Policy for Financing Local Units to Change," 25 November 1989, 3.

4. See Lyndon Cook's *Joseph Smith and the Law of Consecration* (Provo, UT: Grandin Book Company, 1985).

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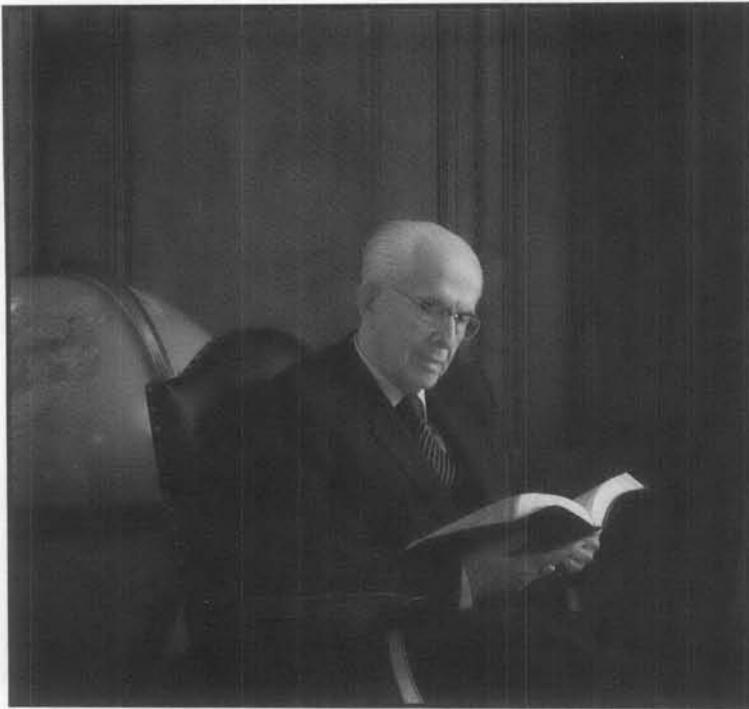
## PSALM

### OCTOBER PRAYER\*

Whatever you may send me  
In the years to come  
Bring back the memory  
You also gave to me  
This shining autumn day.

—MARGARET RAMPTON MUNK

\* Printed in *So Far*, 53.



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