IN MEMORIAM

RICHARD DOUGLAS POLL: ADVOCATE FOR MORMON INTELLECTUALS

By Thomas G. Alexander

ON 27 APRIL 1994 when Richard D. Poll passed away in his Provo home, the historical profession, the Church, and public philanthropy all lost an active participant. As John Donne might have said, with the loss of Dick Poll the community lost a part of itself.

I first met Dick in 1965 when I joined the history faculty at Brigham Young University. During five years of working together, we developed a life-long friendship. He provided a model that helped many of us younger teachers mold our careers. A dedicated and inspiring teacher, he inaugurated the American Heritage course on television, which students affectionately called "The Dick Poll Show."

In 1970, Dick and his wife Emogene (Gene) left for Western Illinois University. His friend John Bernhard, who had served as dean of our college, accepted the position of university president, and he enticed Dick away by offering him the job of vice president for administration. In 1975, Dick declined Bernhard's invitation to follow him again, and remained as a history professor at Western Illinois until his retirement in 1983.

Needless to say, we maintained our contact—you did that with Dick and Gene because they always made you feel at home wherever you met. In 1970–71, Marilyn and I took our family to Carbondale for a sabbatical at Southern Illinois University. Dick and Gene invited us to drive north to Macomb for Thanksgiving. Our oldest children remember that experience with fondness.

After retirement, Dick and Gene returned to their Provo roots and settled down on Grandview Hill. There he continued his research and community service, and occasionally taught a history class at BYU.

Dick was utterly devoted to Gene and their three daughters—Marilyn, Nanette, and Jennifer. Last November, when the daughters and their husbands Gary Bell, Terry Allen, and Clayton Crawford honored Dick and Gene with a fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration, no one expected that

Dick and Gene Poll

within six months both Gene and Dick would be gone. Gene passed away early this year, and in a short time Dick followed.

Born in 1918 during World War I and nurtured during the turbulent 1920s, Dick belonged to that generation of scholars whose youth had been severed by economic depression and violent war. Serving as a missionary during the late 1930s, Dick transferred from Germany to Denmark and finally to Canada as the horror of World War II began to engulf western Europe. Like others of his generation (Gene Campbell, Leonard Arrington, George Ellsworth, Everett Cooley, and Brigham Madsen), Dick served in the armed forces. Like the latter three, he returned from the war to earn a Ph.D. in history at the University of California at Berkeley. A brilliant scholar, Dick held the Thompson fellowship and graduated Phi Beta Kappa.

As a child of the Progressive Era and a youth of the Depression, battered by conflicts between scholarly secularism and an active faith, Dick sought to integrate his religious and intellectual lives. Throughout his career, he sought to understand Mormonism as a personal experience as he probed the relationship of the Latter-day Saints to the larger American society. In his master's thesis at Texas Christian and his Ph.D. dissertation, he investigated the subject that formed the core of his scholarly output, both the thesis and the dissertation examined the nineteenth-century relationship between Mormons and other Americans. Continuing those themes, in the last years of his life, he researched long hours on the Utah War—that misguided but fortunately bloodless conflict between the Mormon people and the American nation. Before his death, he had already begun to sketch the outlines of that study in a Dello G. Dayton Memorial Lecture at Weber State University on Thomas L. Kane and in an article in *BYU Studies* on the massive exodus to Provo, generally called "the move south."

It is no negative reflection on Dick to observe that he placed his role as public intellectual and teacher before his role as scholar. Dick's service to the university and the community reveals his commitment to teaching and service. At BYU, he labored as associate director and as a teacher and mentor in the honors program. The students named him honors professor of the year in 1969. As a public intellectual, he championed at BYU the somewhat unpopular causes of the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Association of University Professors. Later, after he returned to Provo, he immersed himself in the campaign to save the Brigham Young Academy buildings. At the same time, he committed himself to the Provo Library adult literacy program.

Most important, perhaps, as part of his full career he tried to define a role for the intellectual in the Church. As Richard Hofstadter in his seminal book *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* pointed out, genuine intellectuals are uncomfortable with certainty. They prefer to turn answers into questions. This attribute distinguishes intellectuals from apologists who seek to reconcile and defend.

What place do intellectuals who commit their lives to inquiry and questioning have in the LDS church? For Dick, the answer was quite clear: Intellectuals must continue to serve, to believe, and to remain faithful.

What place, Dick asked, do intellectuals who commit their lives to inquiry and questioning have in the LDS church? For him, the answer was quite clear: Intellectuals must continue to serve, to believe, and to remain faithful, while continuing to question and search. As an intellectual and a committed Church member, Dick served—among other callings—in the Oak Hills Second Ward bishopric, on a number of high councils, as president of the Macomb Branch, and as a teacher in the high priests group.

As a service to himself and the community of Mormon intellectuals, he defined a place in the Church for the faithful questioner in a sermon he delivered in the Palo Alto Ward in August 1967, which *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* published in the Winter 1967 issue. For those of us who remain firmly committed both to the Church and to the life of the mind, Dick's "What the Church Means to People Like Me" came as a revelation. He helped us to define ourselves.

His was no mean task. Intellectuals of every generation—Dick's included—have concluded that the soul-wrenching struggle to remain both actively committed to religious faith and to the questioning demanded of true scholars was not worth the cost. Some have taken one of two easy roads out. On the one side, many have chosen to become apologists, deciding that questioning will pay no dividends in the Church. These people decide not to research the hard questions. Committed to authority and central direction, they conform and in doing so ignore or gloss over problems.

On the other side, not a few conclude that commitment to the Church is not worth the struggle and embarrassment. For them, as for the apologists, questioning and commitment to religion becomes ultimately too hard. Certain questions prove too difficult. How do you respond to questions about the Church's previous policy on African-Americans and the priesthood or the practice of polygamy? How do you answer questions about dictation in politics or opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment? What answer do you give when friends quiz you on such matters as public dissent, feminism, or authority? Many intellectuals, uncomfortable about such problems, decide either to slip into inactivity or to sever their connection with the Church.

Clearly, Dick observed, within the Church those who question and those who do not have difficulty living with each other. This happens, he argued, not on the level of intellectual acceptance, but "at the level of personal communion, of empathy."

Nevertheless, Dick argued, although those who decline to question are uncomfortable around questioners, people who question have a firm place in the Church. He developed this argument by defining two ideal types of committed members. The first he labeled "Iron Rods." These are members for whom "each step of the journey to the tree of life was plainly defined." The second, he called "Liahonas." These are members for whom "the clarity of . . . directions varied with the circumstances of the user." For them there "was no infallible delineator of their course." Where the Iron Rod found answers, the Liahona found questions.

"To the Iron Rod a questioning attitude suggests an imperfect faith; to the Liahona an unquestioning spirit betokens a closed mind." For the Iron Rod, answers to virtually all questions appear in "Scripture, Prophetic Authority, and the Holy Spirit." The Liahona, on the other hand, accepts the concepts "that God lives, that He loves His children, that His knowledge and power are efficacious for salvation, and that He does reveal himself." Nevertheless, the Liahona believes that God's will is mediated by "the arm of flesh." Liahonas find problems in such matters as biblical descriptions of Eve's creation from Adam's rib and in the chronology that places the creation at 4,000 B.C. They are uncomfortable with the selective literalism of the Iron Rods that question the one proposition and testify to the other. As they search Church history, instead of unvarying sweetness and harmony, Liahonas find disagreement among prophets over such matters as the League of Nations, the process of creation, and politics.

Dick placed himself squarely with the Liahonas. He denied that the Liahona type was simply another name for the faithless, the apostate, or the cultural Mormon. Rather, he argued that faith in the Atonement, salvation, and exaltation were true principles as were agency, freedom, compassion, and love. Moreover, he felt a sense of commitment to the Latter-day Saints as a people, and exercised faith in a set of principles promising a better life here and in the hereafter.

Undoubtedly if questioned, Dick would say that faithless, apostate, or cultural Mormons are people who have taken the road into inactivity or out of the Church. Although they might identify themselves with the Mormon people, they have little faith in the Atonement, salvation, or revelation. Liahonas, on the other hand, are committed Latter-day Saints who have declined to reject the active life of the mind as a price of active membership.

After Dick's death, in reflecting on the Iron Rod/Liahona model, one of my colleagues, Ted Warner, reminded me of the controversy Dick's article had generated at BYU. The pages of the *Daily Universe*, the student newspaper, was filled with letters arguing about Dick's proposition. Some Iron Rods condemned the article as the rantings of an apostate. On the other hand, Henry Nicholes—often a glorious thorn in BYU President Ernest Wilkinson's side—argued that Iron Rods and Liahonas probably constituted only two of a large number of types of faithful members within the Church.

I'm not comfortable labeling myself as either an Iron Rod or a Liahona. Nevertheless, I find in Dick's recognition that the Church offers a place for the faithful, questioning intellectual a modicum of comfort in the otherwise uncomfortable world peopled only sparsely by Mormon intellectuals like myself.

Dick Poll would have found most unperceptive Bill Mulder's suggestion—citing his wife's quip—that the phrase "Mormon intellectual" is an oxymoron. Richard Hofstadter suggested that the hallmark of the intellectual is discomfort with certainties. Dick Poll would have heartily agreed, and he would have added that whether you call Latter-day Saints who search and question "Mormon intellectuals" or "Liahonas," they are faithful subjects in God's Kingdom. If, as I firmly believe, the celestial kingdom has room for all faithful people, Dick Poll will surely find his seat near God's right hand raising questions, for which the loving Father of us all will express his profound gratitude.

IN MEMORIAM

HELEN CANDLAND STARK
WRITER, ACTIVIST, MENTOR

By Shirley B. Paxman

Helen Candland Stark died 25 May 1994 at her home in Provo, Utah. She was in her ninety-fourth year. A life-long supporter of many worthy causes, including publications such as SUNSTONE, Dialogue, *and* Exponent II, *she will be missed by her many friends and admirers, especially* LDS *women of several generations whom she mentored.*

BORN IN 1901, Helen Candland was the oldest of nine children. Gifted with a "sense of place," she has written movingly in prose and poetry about her family, her childhood, her upbringing in a small Mormon farming community, and her school years at the Brigham Young Training School, High School, and University.[1] She earned a bachelor of science degree and a master's degree from BYU and started her teaching career in the late 1920s. After her marriage to Henry Stark, a Ph.D. research chemist with Dupont, she moved with him to Delaware where they adopted three children and reared them to adulthood. They also help found the first Delaware branch of the LDS church and helped it grow to a full-fledged ward and stake under their devoted leadership.

When Henry retired, they returned to the mountains they loved and spent their last years in Salem and Provo, Utah. Henry died in 1988. Helen expressed her love of Utah's mountains in her poem "Homesick."

I was conceived,
in Mountains
By a strong woman and a faithful man,
And by the hills.
For surely then a power fused their seeds,
A magic from the fir trees and the rock,
In the blue air.

I was brought up
With mountains.
Some things just are, like food and sleep and care,

And like these hills.
They must have fed me and I did not know,
They must have rested me all unaware,
And watched my feet.

I grew to love
The mountains.
I learned the miracle of shade and shape
Taught by the hills—
Thousands of patterns made of cliff and canyon.
Thousands of subtleties of light and color,
Winter, summer, fall.

But I have left the mountains,
How could I know that I'd cry out in dreams
For these my hills?
What is this pain which will not give me peace?
I am no child. Let childish fancies go.
But the blue shadows of the pines are in me,
And the tall air, and the grey rocks and the
Deep hollows of the ferns.

Mother or father of the mountains
Inexorable, inviolate, still,
Whose seed in me is in a barren soil.
Without the hills,
With broken feet I walk a level land,
Clutching an empty sky.[2]

After returning to Utah, Helen and Henry became environmental activists. Helen later wrote, "Because we had observed in Delaware the coarsening encroachment of industry on acre after acre, we have been caught up, here, to speak out against what seems to be a spirit of exploitation. I have spent time writing about conservation for various media, including an article in the *Ensign* on 'Saving the Wetlands.' "[3] They decried what she termed the "bull-dozer mentality" of many public officials.

Out of their concern for and commitment to a proper "stewardship" of the land, the Starks endowed the Lytle Preserve in a corner of southwestern Utah. This protected area—a precious 460 acres—serves BYU, the University of Utah, Idaho State University, and universities as far away as Purdue University in Indiana. This scientific outdoor laboratory is an ecological treasure where students and scientists can study the relationship of riparian lives, the desert environment, as well as migratory patterns in the wetlands and marshes.

Other projects endowed by the Starks include the Women in Science scholarships at BYU, and the establishment of the annual Alice Louise Reynolds Lectureship.

Balance, wholeness, and diversity: these words describe Helen Stark. Her creative side was but one dimension of this many-faceted woman. Her contributions to the world of literature—poetry, personal essays, and short stories—are numerous. In grateful recognition of this considerable body of work, the Association for Mormon Letters honored her with a Lifetime Achievement Award. Helen received this with much joy and appreciation.

"Feminist," a word much maligned by Helen's culture and her church, was an endearing word to her, and she embodied all that was good and positive in it. In a most creative and purposeful way, Helen became

PAIN

I

It has been a long cruel winter.
Bowed with age
And the grinding, unrelenting pain of shingles
I look out of my picture window
At my giant mulberry trees.
Their branches clack
Above the dirty snow,
And I ponder pain.
I ponder dead-end pain.

II

Across the street a door is flung open.
Exuberant children pour out
Intent on building one more snowman.
Their mother follows slowly.
Patiently she bends to adjust
A child's mitten
Accepting the rhythms of gestation
She knows pain now,
She is aware that it will peak to thrust forth
New life—twins!
She is content.

III

Eventually, on the bare branches of
My mulberry trees
Tight buds will break.
They will thrust into leaves.

Can it be
That I am climbing a tall mountain?
If I finally reach the top
I shall lay down my burden,
Turn
To see at my feet the floor of
Earth, foothills and fields.
I shall fling wide my arms,
It is all right, Lord!

COMPLETION

In Autumn
the inner core
of the giant mulberry tree
sent this message to its leaves:
Unlatch!
They fell to the mothering earth
in a golden curtain.

Now in my wintering autumn—
Great Arbiter of life and death,
Speak to my soul your message:
Let go!
Gather me to my loved ones,
My mission done.

an activist very early in the women's movement, energetically aligning herself in women's causes. She wrote letters to editors, general authorities, and politicians and became an articulate and eloquent spokeswoman for women of all ages. She became a confidant and mentor of many women of succeeding generations. She was undaunted by the inevitable criticism that followed her feminism. On one occasion she wrote:

> A high moment for me recently was the Sunstone Symposium [session] on the Heavenly Mother. That such a topic could be addressed at all was something of a miracle. I felt that here was the beginning of an answer to Carol Lynn Pearson's poem that begins "I live in a motherless house." I looked around the audience at the cluster of young women who I knew shared [my] search. It was as though I had given birth. Into their competent hands had passed that illusory charge that had been only dimly recognized by my generation. We are beginning to recognize the potential for a new force at work. There are as yet no clear answers, but a viable, profound ferment is infiltrating the mix. Mormon women are writing poems and Mormon women scholars are discovering scriptures that recapture a feminine force, a force that is numinous, overshadowing and endowed with spiritual powers.

Helen herself contributed much to that feminine force, endowing it with her considerable spiritual power. She spent a lifetime making contributions to her causes. At ninety-three, as she recently wrote in the two poems "Pain" and "Completion," she was ready to go home, her mission done.

NOTES

1. See Helen Candland Stark, "The Good Woman Syndrome, or, When Is Enough, Enough?" *Exponent II* (December 1976) and "Reconciling the Opposites," SUNSTONE 16:8 (February 1994): 64–71. See also Lavina Fielding Anderson, "A Strenuous Business: The Achievement of Helen Candland Stark;" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23:3 (Fall 1990): 12–33.

2. Helen Candland Stark, "Homesick," *Exponent II* (December 1984): 6.

3. See Helen Candland Stark, "Another Kind of Tithe," *Ensign* (October 1972): 38–43.