

## FROM THE EDITOR

## MAHATMA BENNION



By Eugene Elbert Peck

LOWELL L. BENNION died on 21 February 1996. At his funeral, LDS Church President Gordon B. Hinckley noted that "Lowell Bennion never owned a car as nice as any parked" in the East Millcreek Stake Center parking lot. Like Mohandas Gandhi, Lowell Bennion inspired the rich and elite in his lived sermon of service and "plain living and high thinking."

Unlike Saints who went to the University of Utah, I'm one of the thousands of Brigham Young University students who matriculated through eight semesters of LDS religion classes without hearing the name Lowell Bennion (Hugh Nibley stirred my religious quest). Later, through *SUNSTONE* ("Saint for All Seasons: An Interview with Lowell L. Bennion" by Peggy Fletcher, Feb. 1985) and Mormon History Association and Association for Mormon Letters meetings, I learned of his influence on three generations of Mormons.

People often recounted the dramatic story of his inglorious release, after thirty-six years of directing the LDS institute at the U., and his gracious public response of moving on to a life of service: first as associate dean of students at the U. and founding the Teton Valley Boys Ranch and then, in retirement, founding and directing the Salt Lake Community Services Council for twelve years until the infirmities of age made him quit. For me, Lowell Bennion's response of service, instead of rage, was a contemporary example of greeting offense with a kiss, as illustrated in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. It called out similar, if lesser, acts in me.

For many, humanitarian and Lowell are synonymous: the man who visited widows and mobilized others to paint houses or drive

shut-ins to Smith's Food King. That legacy is enshrined in the U.'s Lowell L. Bennion Community Services Center and chronicled in Mary Bradford's recent biography, *Lowell Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian*. One Saturday a few years ago, a study group I belong to volunteered to sort food at the Utah Food Bank, another Bennion legacy. An aged Lowell was a volunteer, too. He slowly raised a can to his eyes, trying to discern what it was while his hand shook furiously from his Parkinson's, then shuffled by inches across the floor to drop it in the appropriate box. He sorted as many items in sixty minutes as each of us did in sixty seconds, but his determination inspired us all.

Lowell's humanitarianism grew out of a simple and well-articulated theology he developed while he taught at the Institute, he preached from countless pulpits, including his ward's while he was bishop, and authored Church manuals and other books, including his later "little books," whose penetrating, crisp, elegant prose approaches that of the Gospels'. His deliberations on religion and the pursuit of truth always led to action. At a memorial service, one person quoted him: "If we ask God to help the helpless and do nothing ourselves, then we believe only God has to be religious." He frequently quoted Micah's summation of the good that God expects of us: "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (Micah 6:8). "To action alone hast thou a right, not to its fruits," he often quoted from the Bhagavad Gita.

Lowell was involved with *Sunstone* symposiums since the first one in 1979. I first met Lowell through hosting him at *Sunstone* symposiums and editing his speeches ("What

It Means to be a Christian," *SUNSTONE*, July 1987; "The Moral Component of Religion," July 1988; and "Faith and Knowledge," Dec. 1991). In honor of Lowell, at the *Sunstone* symposium this summer (see page ??), we will feature sessions that evaluate his teachings and life. We also will inaugurate the first of an annual Lowell Bennion Lecture, which takes Micah's call for social justice as its theme. Donations to endow the lecture are welcome.

I've scoured Benchmark Books for every out-of-print Bennion book. Each time I read or reread one, I am impressed at how many current Mormon approaches and interpretations seem to have roots in Lowell's teachings: from not relying on one scripture but taking them in the aggregate, which Apostle Boyd Packer teaches, to Apostle Neal Maxwell's oft-quoted "Religion is the fairer things that matter most are not ultimately at the mercy of the things that matter least" (William P. Montague). Some ideas are Bennion originals, others he proselyted. His impact is broad and, generally, unfootnoted. Our next issue will examine Lowell's legacy in more depth.

One sleepless summer evening, I sat on my balcony and read *Legacies of Jesus* under an Itty Bitty Book Lite. Each of the short chapters beautifully distilled Lowell's lifelong teachings on the Master and called me to the better way. That night, I haunted Salt Lake's Avenues till dawn, pondering my discipleship. All of Lowell's books are now out of print and are hot items at used book stores (and parents' libraries), except the just released *How Can I Help?* Final Selections of the Legendary Writer, Teacher, Humanitarian Lowell Bennion, a selection of later essays whose collection he supervised prior to his death (see inside back cover). Browse through the comprehensive bibliography Gene England compiled several years ago ("A Bibliography of Works by and about Lowell Bennion," *SUNSTONE*, July 1988), and you'll agree that a philanthropist needs to underwrite a multi-volume publication of the complete writings of Lowell Bennion (similar to that of Hugh Nibley's). Mormonism needs to retain memory of Lowell's teachings.

Last month, perched atop the ocean cliffs of the Marin Headlands just north of the Golden Gate Bridge, I reread *The Things that Matter Most*, which Lowell self-published and self-distributed through nine printings (he hand delivered copies to the BYU Bookstore when they sold out) Each pithy chapter outlines one aspect of the religious life that "contribute[s] to the quality and goodness of life": Health; Economic

Sufficiency; Sensuous Satisfaction; Aesthetic Feeling; Learning; Human Relationships; Integrity; Love; Freedom; Creativity; Faith. This classic Mormon approach to religion and spirituality embraces all truth and all aspects of living: spirituality is learning, and aesthetics and the five senses and exercise and friendship! Bennion's view of religion was more than a theology, it was a culture—a rich, expansive, interconnecting web of relationships, service, and growth, all of which emanated from and returned to an ethical monotheistic God. With these liberal, humanistic qualities being so prominent in the religion, no wonder even LDS doubters in previous generations could still feel genuinely Mormon. They were nourished by and nourished others in all the other spiritual aspects of the Mormon way and community—and liked the good taste of it. Today, they really aren't welcome at the table, whose menu is a much more spartan diet of doctrines and practices.

In correlating Mormonism, we've narrowed not only its institutional focus to right thinking and believing, ritual performances, and social duty, but the surrounding religious and spiritual culture has also been constricted, too. Sadly, much of the discourse among so-called Mormon liberals, including in the pages of *SUNSTONE*, mirrors that narrowing. *Things* called me as editor to repent. Yes, the magazine should host discussions about and report on the current intellectual inquiries, but more than we do now, we should also prominently feature explorations and celebrations of the things that matter most, that broad Mormon vision of the good life. *SUNSTONE* should affirm that Mormonism is *all* these good things—health, knowledge, friendship, love, service, and faith. It is not a narrow, conservative, rule-bound religion, but an expansive way of life that defines spirituality and religion as all growth and goodness. As part of the symposium's Bennion commemoration, I'd like a session on each chapter in *Things*, which we would later serialize in the magazine; proposals are welcome.

The late Sterling McMurrin said that every religion needs a saint, and Lowell is Mormonism's. Saints are individuals whose lives rise above the everyday clutter and call out the best in our selves and our culture. The Nobel Prize winning Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore gave Mohandas Gandhi the title Mahatma—great soul—for doing that in India. In Mormonism, we call every one a saint, but we have few Mahatmas. Lowell Bennion is one. ☐

## IN MEMORIAM

### LOWELL BENNION



By Frederick S. Buchanan

**L**OWELL BENNION made a difference to me as an undergraduate student at the University of Utah. He did so when he opened up the moral dimension of the Old Testament and showed me how Amos and Micah were the forerunners of the social gospel of Jesus. Before I took his Institute classes, I knew Amos only as a single verse (Amos 3:7) in the "Anderson Missionary Plan." We used it to prove that prophets were a necessary part of the true church's organization.

Lowell introduced us to the living Amos by having the class play the role of Israelites. He animatedly took the part of Amos and began denouncing the sins of Moab and Judah. Our class cheered him on with self-righteous vigor as he proclaimed: "Moab will die with tumult, with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet" and "I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem."

Then he began enumerating the sins of Israel. We now jeered and booed him loudly as he dared to condemn the chosen Israelites. We fell silent as he accused us of selling "the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes"; for panting "after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor and [turning] aside

*FRED BUCHANAN was a student of Lowell's in the late 1950s. For the last few months of Lowell's life, Fred visited him weekly and read to him. This tribute was given at the memorial service "Lowell Bennion Made a Difference" at the University of Utah LDS Institute on 17 March 1996.*

the way of the meek." Suddenly, Amos was speaking to me personally. I was challenged spiritually and morally when I heard the Lord say through Amos (via Brother B.), "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offering and meat offerings I will not accept them. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." (Amos 5:24.) The things that matter most must prevail.

As we studied the Old Testament, Lowell introduced us to the driving power behind the prophets like Amos and Micah—the notion of ethical monotheism. The Lord God is One, and he is ethical—not arbitrary nor capricious—in his relations with his children. He expects us to emulate these characteristics in our lives. This is the "plumb line" that the Lord held against Israel and that he will use to judge us. This notion opened up an entirely new dimension of my understanding of the nature of God and of our relationship to him. It added a concrete moral dimension to what had been, for me at least, mainly a doctrinal system of abstract beliefs. As a result of the open and stimulating discussions in Lowell Bennion's classes, I began to see that without a moral, horizontal, social relationship with others, it was impossible to maintain a genuine, vertical, spiritual relationship with God.

Along with increased insight into the moral message of the Old Testament, Lowell Bennion opened to me a more expansive view of salvation through Jesus Christ. In addition to saving us from the limitations of mortality,

## TURNING THE TIME OVER TO...

Lowell L. Bennion

HOW TO READ THE  
BOOK OF MORMON

Jesus by his life and example saves us from the baneful effects of ignorance and sin in our own lives and in the lives of our associates. One of Lowell's classes dealt with the need for personal integrity and Jesus' role in helping us achieve and maintain our integrity in the face of forces that seek to undermine it. Jesus, he believed, was a major source of personal self-respect. If he forgives us, why should we be unwilling to forgive ourselves?

Lowell's approach to religion also helped me survive the great waves of doubt and questioning that are a necessary part of becoming alive intellectually. For him, doubt was part of the process of developing faith. He helped me view doubt as a stepping stone not as a destination. What is more, he taught us to "doubt our doubts" and to keep our minds and hearts open for further light and knowledge from scripture, science, literature, personal revelation, inspiring leaders, or, the mainstay of Lowell's countless examples, everyday experience. With Tennyson, he held that: "There lives more faith in honest doubt / Believe me, than in half the creeds."

One of my most treasured statements from Lowell is the entry he made in our family visitors' book. He wrote "Lowell L. Bennion, alias Amos." Indeed he was a prophet in a very real sense, although like Amos, he would deny it and say he was no prophet nor a prophet's son, but only a teacher of youth and a part-time farmer. To sit in Lowell Bennion's classes was in many ways the best liberal education I ever received. I shall be ever grateful for the message he communicated, the teaching skill he demonstrated, and the difference he made in my life. God bless his example to us all. ☞



*"The Book of Mormon is a religious book.*

*If you want to get anything out of it, you read it with the same intent and same interest that the authors put into it."*



## ST. LOWELL

There once was a man called Saint Lowell  
Who helped many get off of the dole.  
Work did not make him blanch—  
At the food bank, boys ranch.  
With his death we all lost a great soul.

—BRIAN KAGEL

SUNSTONE welcomes the submission of other  
Lowell Bennion limericks.

OVER HALF A century ago, when I started to teach at the LDS Institute at the University of Utah, I decided I had better find out something about the Book of Mormon. My wife and I went to the University of Washington in Seattle to take a course in American archeology. I was going to prove that the Book of Mormon was true by archeological data. So we read the textbook faithfully and concentrated on American archeology and anthropology. When the

LOWELL L. BENNION spent his life teaching and writing about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. This speech, his last given at Sunstone, was delivered at the Sunstone Book of Mormon lecture series on 14 January 1992 in Salt Lake City; he approved this transcription shortly thereafter.

course was over, I hid out for two or three days reading the Book of Mormon, looking for material I could relate to archeology. I was disappointed because I found very little. In fact, I can't remember finding anything.

I made another discovery as I read the book: It was a book on religion. I noted, too, that if you're going to use scientific data, you need to be a scientist in that field; if you're going to use archeological data, you'd better be an archeologist. I wasn't either. So for the last fifty-odd years, I've tried to teach the religion in the Book of Mormon. This may be old hat; I'm not sure that I can point out anything new about the Book of Mormon. But, that's my thesis: the Book of Mormon is a religious book. If you want to get anything out of it, you read it with the same intent and same interest that the authors put into it. I'm

going to review a few of my favorite religious teachings from the book.

The Book of Mormon states its religious purpose right at the outset. The first author of the book, Nephi, wrote:

And it mattereth not to me that I am particular to give a full account of all the things of my father, for they cannot be written upon these plates, for I desire the room that I may write of the things of God. For the fullness of mine intent is that I may persuade men to come unto the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and be saved. Wherefore the things which are pleasing unto the world I do not write, but the things which are pleasing unto God and unto those who are not of the world. Wherefore, I shall give commandment unto my seed, that they shall not occupy these plates with things which are not of worth unto the children of men. (1 Ne. 6:3-6.)

The second author was Nephi's brother Jacob. He notes in the first chapter, where he takes over keeping the records, that Nephi told him

that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed. . . . And if there were preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying, that I should engraven the heads of them upon these plates, and touch upon them as much as it were possible, for Christ's sake, and for the sake of our people. (Jacob 1:3-4.)

In the last chapter of 2 Nephi, Nephi says: But I, Nephi, have written what I have written, and I esteem it as of great worth, and especially unto my people. For I pray continually for them by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night. . . . And I know that the Lord God will consecrate my prayers for the gain of my people. And the words which I have written in weakness will be made strong unto them; for it persuadeth them to do good; it maketh known unto them of their fathers; and it speaketh of Jesus, and persuadeth them to believe in him, and to endure to the end, which is life eternal. And it speaketh harshly against sin, according to the plainness of the truth. . . . (2 Ne. 33:3-5.)

You know, the Bible doesn't declare its purpose like the Book of Mormon does. The Bible is also a religious book, but it doesn't say that that's its purpose. Down through the centuries, people have taken the Bible to be an explanation of everything. We all know about the conflicts in the Middle Ages and the early dawn of modern times when the church was in conflict with the scientists. I'm glad the Book of Mormon states its purpose forthrightly; we don't expect to explain everything from the book.

I think it's a great mistake for people to worry about the scientific aspects of life as described in the Bible or the Book of Mormon. They try to make a geology book out of Genesis; that's a gross error. I believe we should get religion out of religious works, science out of scientific works, philosophy out of philosophical works. To my knowledge, the Book of Mormon has had no conflict with science. Let me put it this way. The scientist who studies the age of the earth, the creation of the earth, has entirely a different approach than the religious man who wrote the story of the creation in Genesis. These are two different views, and they get their harmony out of what each can give to life—our understanding of life—rather than expecting them to be identical. I think people who think that the world was created in six days or six thousand years, and worry about that and base their faith on it, are really in a sad situation. Genesis says after each creation that it was good. After God created man and woman, it was very good. That is the religious point of Genesis; that life is God-created and good. Science and religion can each contribute to the good in life. I go to my bishop for spiritual advice; I don't go to him to take out my appendix.

Scriptures are not only not scientific, they're not particularly historical. If you're a historian and you read the Book for Mormon for history, you'd be disappointed. The authors didn't have a plan; it's not well organized as a history. Nor is it the theological

book. Theology is abstract, rational; you won't find the doctrines of religions spelled out in an organized, rationalized fashion in any scripture: the Doctrine and Covenants, the Bible, or the Book of Mormon.

Scripture is a religious response to life—people pleading for faith in God or Christ, prophets crying unto people to repent. They are the books of religion applied to life.

HERE are examples of religion in the Book of Mormon that excite me. The first is Alma the Younger, who, you remember, was converted to the Church and went around preaching to the Nephite settlements. He didn't have much success, but he came to one group of people who was not permitted to worship because of their poverty. Listen carefully to what Alma said to this group of people who had been cast out of their synagogue:

I say unto you, it is well that ye are cast out of your synagogues, that ye may be humble, and that ye may learn wisdom; for it is necessary that ye should learn wisdom; for it is because that ye are cast out, that ye are despised of your brethren because of your exceeding poverty, that ye are brought to a lowliness of heart; for ye are necessarily brought to be humble. And now, because ye are compelled to be humble blessed are ye; for a man *sometimes*, if he is compelled to be humble, seeketh repentance; and now surely, whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved. (Alma 32:12-13, emphasis added.)

That's a remarkable word, *J14*

. People who are humbled by poverty or by shame or by ill health, *sometimes* it leads to humility; other times it leads to bitterness.

And now, as I said unto you, that because ye were compelled to be



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humble ye were blessed, do ye not suppose that they are more blessed who truly humble themselves because of the word? Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed—yea, much more blessed than they who are compelled to be humble because of their exceeding poverty. Therefore, blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble; or rather, in other words, blessed is he that believeth in the word of God, and is baptized without stubbornness of heart, yea, without being brought to know the word, or even compelled to know, before they will believe. (Alma 32:14–16.)

That's very simple talk, but it's true to life. People who are humbled by external circumstances sometimes learn humility; sometimes they don't. Humility comes from conversion to ideas or to God or Christ.

That same chapter in Alma is also a great chapter on faith. He talks about faith as a growing experience.

Now as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge. But behold, if you will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a

portion of my words. (Alma 32:26–27.)

That is the only place I've seen the word *experiment* in scripture. Alma talks about the growth of a tree from a seed; growth in faith. He says,

But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out. Now, this is not because the seed was not good, neither is it because the fruit thereof would not be desirable; but it is because your ground is barren, and you will not nourish the tree, therefore you cannot have the fruit thereof. (Alma 32:38–39.)

That's good practical sense. I like the concluding verses where he says,

But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life. And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof,

Notice how he says the fruit of faith, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye

hunger not, neither shall ye thirst. (Alma 32:41–42.)

I think those are the best fruits of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, namely that when you have them, ye hunger not for meaning, purpose, and value in life. "Ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst." The gospel doesn't spare you from difficulties and suffering and disappointment, but there's fulfillment, there's meaning in pursuing a life of faith.

I found only one verse in the Book of Mormon that I think is humorous, just one. This is a dead-earnest book! This passage is probably speaking of our day:

Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us. And there shall also be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die, and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we and shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark. . . .

For behold, at that day shall he rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good [that is, Satan will]. And others will he pacify, and lull them away into carnal security, that they will say: All is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well—and thus the devil cheateth their souls, and leadeth them away *carefully* down to hell. (2 Ne. 28:7–9, 20–21, emphasis added.)

I love that word *carefully*. You know when we get out of harmony with life, there are two ways to reestablish harmony: one is to repent; the other is to rationalize and justify our behavior, and that's done *carefully*, kind of subconsciously. I like that.

Alma is a great book. If I had to have just one book from the Book of Mormon, it would be Alma. I particularly like Alma 34 where he talks about the Atonement.



"No, looks aren't everything, but I do think one hundred percent home teaching is something to consider!"

***“Religion isn’t just a matter of God’s will; it’s a matter of human interests, too. I don’t think scriptures are dictated by God, are the voice of God. They may be in places, but revelation is a relationship between God and humankind.”***

**I**N Third Nephi, Jesus teaches his ideas in a natural way and a natural setting; he discusses humility when people are humbled. When Jesus visited the Nephites after his resurrection, he spoke the Sermon on the Mount to them and he made two additions that are meaningful to me. First of all, he introduces the sermon with words you don’t find in the New Testament:

And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words unto Nephi, and to those who had been called, (now the number of them who had been called, and received power and authority to baptize, was twelve) and behold, he stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying: Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you to minister unto you, and to be your servants. . . . (3 Ne. 12:1.)

Those are two wonderful ideas and simple, too. The admonition is to follow their leaders who are their servants. It’s good for members of the Church to follow the leaders, and it’s awfully good for the leaders to think that they are servants who minister to the people. It’s remarkable to me that two simple and fundamental ideas are inserted here as an introduction to the Sermon on the Mount. When he gets to the Beatitudes, he says, “Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit *who come unto me*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (3 Ne. 12:3). The Book of Mormon adds “who come unto me.” It’s obvious that Joseph Smith borrowed New Testament Bible language. He’s been criticized for doing that, but he makes some very meaningful changes. I think a person can be humble but not find his way in life. If one is humble, and it leads to acquaintance with Jesus and his values and way of life, then it’s really a blessed condition.

It helps to add “who come unto me” to each beatitude. The second beatitude is “blessed are they that mourn [who come unto me] for they shall be comforted” (3 Ne. 12:4). “Mourn” doesn’t refer to those who mourn for the dead; it means those who mourn for their sins and repent. Therefore:

“Blessed are they who repent [and come unto me] for they shall be comforted”—they shall be successful in repenting and be comforted by their wholeness of life. And, “Blessed are the meek [who come unto me]. . . .”; “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness [who come unto me] for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.” Well, you know the Beatitudes, so I won’t recite them further. In my judgment, this is a simple idea with profound meaning.

One of my favorite books in the Book of Mormon is Moroni. In chapter 8, Moroni condemns infant baptism as a mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit and putting trust in dead works. Now, notice this statement about the first principles and ordinances of the gospel:

Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be [infant baptism]; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law. And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling of commandments bringeth remission of sins; And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. (Moro. 8:24–26.)

To me, that’s a beautiful, powerful statement of the first principles and ordinances. Repentance leads to baptism, baptism leads to humility and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost is maintained by prayer.

Another favorite scripture is where Alma says to his son, Shiblon, as he sends him out to do missionary work, “Use boldness, but not overbearance” (Alma 38:12). There’s a wonderful difference between boldness and overbearance. Overbearance means that you knock the other guy down, you deprecate him. Whereas missionaries can be bold if they are not demeaning and oppressive to the

listener.

Chapter 26 of Second Nephi is a choice chapter:

For behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you that the Lord God worketh not in darkness. He doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. (2 Ne. 26:23–24.)

Think of the issue of blacks and the priesthood as you read this:

. . . he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation. Behold, doth he cry unto any, saying, Depart from me? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; but he saith: Come unto me all ye ends of the earth, buy milk and honey, without money and without price. Behold, hath he commandeth any that they should depart out of the synagogues, or out of the houses of worship? Behold, I say unto you, Nay. Hath he commandeth any that they should not partake of his salvation? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but he hath given it free for all men; and he hath commanded his people that they should persuade all men to repentance. Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden. (2 Ne. 26:24–28.)

Did you notice that last sentence? “Behold, I say unto you, . . . *all men are privileged the one like unto the other, and none are forbidden.*”

He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion. Behold, the Lord hath forbidden this thing; wherefore, the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have

charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing. Wherefore, if they should have charity they would not suffer the laborer in Zion to perish. But the laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money they shall perish. And again, the Lord God hath commanded that men shall not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that they should not contend one with another; that they should not commit whoredoms; and that they should do none of these things; for whoso doeth them shall perish. For none of these iniquities come of the Lord; for he doeth that which is good among the children of men; and he doeth nothing save it shall be plain unto the children of men; and he inviteth all to come unto him and to partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, *black and white*, bond and free, *male and female*; and he remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Ne. 26:29–33, emphasis added.)

I don't know why we didn't give the blacks the priesthood sooner. If we believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God, I think that scripture would have given us enough authority to do that. Don't quote me out of context.

Now, concerning women: 2 Nephi 26:33 also says male and female are alike unto God. I read in the Doctrine and Covenants that these commandments are of God and given unto his servants when they *ask*—when they inquire, when they seek wisdom. President Kimball inquired about the blacks. Women haven't asked enough, and men haven't paid much attention to them down through the ages.

Religion isn't just a matter of God's will; it's a matter of human interests, too. It's high time we were paying attention to our ladyfolks.

**I**N conclusion, the Book of Mormon is a religious book. It has some great ideas that are simply explained and illustrated.

I suggest one other guide to reading the Book of Mormon, in fact, to reading all the scriptures. I don't think scriptures are dictated by God, are the voice of God. They may be in places, but revelation is a

relationship between God and humankind. My favorite passage on the nature of revelation is in the Doctrine and Covenants:

Behold, I am God and . . . these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding. And inasmuch as they erred it might be made known; And inasmuch as they sought

wisdom they might be instructed; And inasmuch as they sinned they might be chastened, that they might repent; And inasmuch as they were humbled they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive knowledge from time to time. (D&C 1:24–28.)

I encourage you to read the Book of Mormon and ask what it says to you about your religious living. I like the book myself. ☐



## SWIMMING IN THE GULF OF MEXICO

*Live water heals memories.*

—Annie Dillard

Swimming in the shade of a thundercloud  
darkness keeps falling I cannot see  
my arms and legs under the water  
olive green grim as if my old body  
is a beautiful peagreen boat without  
enough air too many cigarettes.

Not safe a dangerous current dragged  
by the fist of this sea where Tampa Bay  
meets the Gulf (like catching a bus)  
there is no dividing line if I cross  
over I join the blue god.

The moon's decision causes double tides  
sometimes four where in this vast sea  
of childhood memory is the chest of salt?  
telling the same story over and over  
spilled sparkling like a chest of pearls  
or stars allowing me to float so  
my center is buoyancy.

—ANNE FASULO