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YEA, YEA  NAY, NAY

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

IN the June 1996 issue, SUNSTONE spotlighted a new religious group in Manti, Utah (see "The Manti Mormons: The Rise of the Latest Mormon Church"). In the picture on page 35 of two men working on a construction project in front of the "Endowment House," the man you identified as Jim Davis, is not Dr. James Davis of Leeds, Utah. This misrepresentation has had an effect on his chiropractor business and reputation.

VICKI DAVIS
Leeds, UT

O PIONEERS!

SINCE the late 1970s, the Church has strived toward an international church, a church for all the world. And as a stake president, I tried to implement that view for the Netherlands. Presuming that the "international church" motto still holds, why has the Church ordered the worldwide commemoration of 150 years of Utah pioneer history in 1997? Of course, the Pioneers are extremely important in the formation of the Church in Utah and the United States, but not for the rest of the world. Although the First Presidency directive gives a very broad interpretation of "pioneer"—anyone who contributes in establishing the Church—in the accompanying guidelines, the international view gets lost. After that broad definition, the guidelines suggest a number of activities, each bearing mainly on the Utah pioneers, as do the logo (a handcart) and the theme ("each step in faith"). The only cultural translation is to an LDS branch of Cambodians who celebrated their first converts—not in Cambodia but in Utah and Massachusetts!

Why is this celebration not a good idea on the international scene? First, "pioneer" does not have the same positive ring in many cultures, and the notions "pioneer spirit" and "pioneer values" have no meaning, let alone "pioneer meals or recipes" (guideline quotes). Also, locating pioneer graves would be hard to do in Europe, Africa, or Japan.

More important, each country abroad has its own significant history, often much older than Deseret's. They have their own role models, their culture's heroes, their liberators, their founding fathers (or mothers!). But to call these people "pioneers" is a misnomer. To try to mold these different national histories within a "pioneer" framework is not only slightly insulting, it is also a missed opportu-

nity. The Church units abroad could have been asked to select significant moments or events in their national history and celebrate these in their contribution to righteousness. Synchronized (though why synchronize at all?) with the Utah celebrations, this could have resulted in a cross-cultural palette of Christian role models and values. The present guidelines by no means lead toward such a valuable interchange. What happened to the motto, "a faith for all cultures"?

WALTER E.A. VAN BEEK
Utrecht Ward, Netherlands

A LIBERAL CONVERT

JOINING the Church would have been impossible without shifting my thinking. I had to give up the plenary view of biblical interpretation—a relief, since I had accepted it reluctantly. When inspiration did not have to mean inerrancy, I felt freer to exercise religion without giving up intellectual integrity. I needed something to help define faith in an intellectually satisfying way. God directed me to *Is God a Creationist?*, edited by Roland Mushat Frye. Later, the New American Bible showed me that sound scholarship does not necessarily mean denying faith.

Due to meeting my future wife, I studied Mormon history and doctrine. I knew to ignore anti-Mormon inflammatory remarks; however, as to their facts, what I could confirm proved to be true. In light of Mormonism's conflicts with the Bible (as preached by evangelicals), I came to believe that the Church's claims were not true. Nevertheless, some things attracted me. Foremost was the idea that families could be eternal. Next was the three-fold division of heaven, which appealed to my sense of justice. Also, while Protestants believe in the universal priesthood of believers, Mormons practice it better.

Carrie insisted on a temple marriage, but I felt I could not join unless I gave up my intellectual integrity. "If the Church is what it says it is, then prove it," I repeated. If the Book of Mormon were "true," then there should be archaeological evidence. Carrie bought *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Even without training in archaeology, I saw how far-fetched (at best) John Sorenson's reasoning is.

A friend of hers gave me J. Reuben Clark's *Why I Believe*. It turned out to be another tract with the same Church reasoning, the same (out-of-context) Bible verses with supporting arguments that either ignored or brushed aside logical and historical prob-

lems. The same was true for John Widtsoe's *Evidence and Reconciliations* and LeGrand Richards's *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*.

It became obvious that to accept the Church at all, I would have to do so on a different basis than the conservative viewpoint. My study led me to publications like *SUNSTONE* and the New Mormon Historians like D. Michael Quinn. Jan Shipp's *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* put the Mormon movement in a new perspective.

After reconciling some aspects of biblical inspiration, particularly the nature of prophecy (through Catholic writings), not only could I find faith in an errant Bible, I could put the failed prophecies of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, etc., into perspective.

Honest, open scholarship, utilizing historical and literary criticism, will open up new vistas, and it can enrich a religious tradition. In order for it to do so, however, one must give up the idea that everything must have one right interpretation.

New Approaches to the Book of Mormon, es-

says edited by Brent Lee Metcalfe, helped me appreciate the Book of Mormon and helped me define how I would approach Mormon doctrine and scripture. Ironically, Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* caused me to appreciate Joseph Smith as a person rather than seeing him as a fraud. It also helped place his actions in their historical perspective, which does not exonerate all of them but does explain why he did some things.

The net effect: I can affirm the Church to be true, the Book of Mormon the word of God, Joseph Smith a prophet ordained by God and succeeded by God-ordained prophets—with intellectual integrity. I believe that God led me through this process.

TIMOTHY A. GRIFFY
Phoenix, AZ

PECULIAR INTELLECTUALS

I'M NOT LDS, but I subscribe to *SUNSTONE* and occasionally read the *Ensign*. When shortly after his excommunication, D. Michael Quinn was disinvented from his

scheduled lecture at Southern Utah University, the faculty raised the money to bring him to Cedar City for a non-university-sponsored talk (see "Stake Presidency Opposes Quinn's Speech," *SUNSTONE*, June 1994). An LDS faculty member contributed twenty dollars, but he admonished, "You're in for a big surprise," knowing that the non-Mormons were expecting a disgruntled firebrand. We were surprised. During the first half-hour of his talk, Quinn bore his testimony. Instead of a firebrand, a loyal Mormon defended his faith (see Quinn, "Dilemmas of Feminists and Intellectuals in the Contemporary LDS Church," *SUNSTONE*, June 1994).

Here is what amazes me about the LDS community and especially about you intellectuals who publish and read *SUNSTONE*: Even the victims of what Armand L. Mauss calls the recent "heresy trials" do not abandon their faith (see "Authority, Agency, and Ambiguity: The Elusive Boundaries of Required Obedience to Priesthood Leaders," *SUNSTONE*, Mar. 1996); they simply bear their testimony at symposiums instead of





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sacrament meetings. So many excommunicated Mormons cling to their faith, their love of their spiritual community, and their belief that they will spend time and eternity with their loved ones in the celestial kingdom.

One of my favorite writers, Carol Lynn Pearson, speculates "Could Feminism Have Saved the Nephites?" (SUNSTONE, Mar. 1996). A radical thought to some, but what's amazing to this non-Mormon is that this brilliant woman *really believes* there were Nephites and that the Book of Mormon accurately portrays their experience. Isn't that *enough* to earn her an irrevocable celestial kingdom recommend? Does she still have to worry that speculations concerning Mother in Heaven will keep her out?

Don't Church leaders recognize that the "dangerous" radical element of intellectuals, feminists, and homosexuals are incredibly faithful Mormons? I love you brave, peculiar people; I am inspired by your faith; I enjoy your humor and thought-provocation.

STEVE SUSOEFF
San Francisco

PLAYING CHICKEN

I WAS impressed with Edgar Snow's comments on Shiz with his head cut off ("Head Over Heels," SUNSTONE, June 1996). Snow assumes that Shiz "could have run around like a chicken with its head cut off . . . Apparently chickens can do this; my grandmother used to say she had seen it happen." I have chopped the heads off numerous chickens, and there is no way that a chicken has ever "ran around" with its head cut off. The expression alludes to uncoordinated and erratic motion—that is all. The muscles of a decapitated chicken contract in such a way that the legs kick out and the wings fling. To "run around," a chicken would have to have balance and a sense of direction, which it does not have without a head. Even if a decapitated animal were placed on its feet, one kick would send it bouncing and flailing.

If we believe Ether 15, a weary Coriantumr, still undoubtedly "drunken with anger," cut off Shiz's head, who then raised himself up on his hands before he died. Had there been an ancient tale (like that of chickens) that men with their heads removed can raise up, then a writer in that period could have assumed it to be true and included it—whether or not it actually happened.

Snow's comments beautifully illustrate how an honest writer can make an erroneous statement.

C. DWAYNE OGZEWALLA
Lake Wales, FL

Edgar Snow responds:

I agree with Ogzewalla. My grandmother, who had also wrung a few chickens' necks, was exaggerating—just a bit of fowl play. I was merely suggesting that Shiz's decapitation scene might have been a poetic stretch as well, much like the passage I quoted from *The Iliad* about lopped-off hero's heads continuing to speak. Ogzewalla's comment "how an honest writer can make an erroneous statement" is appreciated, since few people lavish compliments of honesty on persons of my legal profession. But, the irony is, I was trying to be ironic (apparently not successfully), not necessarily honest or accurate in mentioning of chickens losing their heads.

CHECK THE LABELS

"ANONYMOUS BISHOP" uses a rhetorical style that marginalizes people whose lives differ from those of "regular" Church members (see "Stay with God: A Response to 'Oliver Alden'," SUNSTONE, June 1996). "Bishop" will not "allow [himself] to be 'branded' with any human cultural definition," yet he insists on using the cultural label "demon" to describe homosexuality. This, of course, accords with attitudes about sexuality that have long suppressed people who have powerful drives that make them "differ-

ent" from heterosexuals. This labelling refuses to acknowledge that God has a greater understanding of the diverse human condition than do we. Throughout history, minority groups from women to peoples of color have suffered under the stigma of the demon label—a stigma that results from fear and ignorance, not from love and acceptance. By establishing the "demonic" nature of homosexuality, we deprive homosexuals of the opportunity for self-acceptance and self-love, not to mention that we erase their divine nature by giving them a satanic heritage.

My out-of-the-closet homosexual friends successfully maintain relationships that are as happy, healthy, and functional as my heterosexual relationship. We need to seek a deeper comprehension of human sexuality, to discuss sexual issues openly and frankly, and to open our hearts to that which we don't understand—to foster community for all members regardless of cultural labels.

MATTHEW H. WOOD
Morgantown, WV

MYSTERIOUS WAYS

I AM surprised at many of the responses to "Anonymous Bishop." Jennifer Goodfellow stated, "With all the research and experience showing that one's sexual orienta-



"This royal throne of kings and queens, priests and priestesses, this anointed valley, this bannered mountaintop, this seat of Ephraim, this other Eden, demi-paradise, this fortress built by nature for herself against infection and the hand of war; this happy breed of Saints, this little world, this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this Salt Lake Valley!"

tion can not be changed, I was amazed someone still believes that with enough prayer a gay can become straight." Such thinking, she said, is "outdated and misinformed." A belief in God (as he is known to us through modern revelation) is a belief that he can perform miracles. Can any believing Mormon truly admit that God has no power over his children's sexuality? Is it beyond the scope of God's infinite power to cause such a change in a homosexual?

I fully understand that there are many homosexuals who will never experience a change in their sexual orientation, despite all their best efforts and prayers. To this I can only answer: God works in mysterious ways. But to deny God's power in these matters is unthinkable.

KENT R. BEAN
Lehi, UT

CURRENT SCHOLARSHIP

MARK THOMAS'S letter with respect to Carol Lynn Pearson's "Could Feminism have saved the Nephites" struck me as rather myopic. He hammers on Pearson for not following "current scholarship" on New Testament authorship, and he takes Mormon liberals to task for not being sufficiently committed to truth, such as the notion that the story of the woman taken in adultery should not be taken as authentic.

"Current scholarship," however, is a broad river, changing all the time with all sorts of flows and directions, depending on

the assumptions and methods chosen for navigation. If a group of scholars, such as the Jesus Seminar, approaches the text with methods driven by a common set of secular assumptions and values, then, surprise, their "truth" depicts Jesus as a secular figure, hidden from sight by later religious accretions that became the New Testament.

If a scholar like Richard Elliot Friedman in *Who Wrote the Bible?* (Harper, 1987) adopts the assumptions and methods that produced the Documentary Hypothesis, he can put together a very persuasive and impressive reading of the Noah story as being spliced together from distinct accounts by two different authors. But however impressive Friedman's reading, however scholarly his methods, it is rather strange and startling to find that the Noah account is chiasmic (see Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn's *Before Abraham Was* [San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989]). Hence, the same redundant phenomena in the Noah text that Friedman takes as evidence for dual authors can be easily accounted for by another set of assumptions that shows the repetition as a conscious artfulness that unifies the story. Friedman's approach completely overlooks the poetic aspects of the story, a class of information that is right in front of his eyes and directly relevant to his conclusions. He does this while being scholarly, scientific, respectful, devotional, utterly sincere and honest, brimming with integrity, and completely in line with the dominant scholarly consensus.

Even in the sciences, some of the criteria

by which we test assumptions are "simplicity and aesthetics," "fruitfulness," and "future promise" (Thomas Kuhn's terms, from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*). Read the story of the adulteress while assuming that these values matter. What truth value does the story have in this context?

KEVIN CHRISTENSEN
Lawrence, KS

OFF MARK

MARK THOMAS'S criticism of Carol Lynn Pearson misses the mark. If we took him seriously, only people who are up-to-date on biblical scholarship could speak at Church, and that's crazy. Some of the best moral sermons I've heard have been preached by true believers who have never heard of "higher criticism." It is perfectly acceptable to take our received text on its own terms and mine it for the truths its stories contain. I do that when I read the Book of Mormon. I have no idea whether it is historical; however, when I read it for its messages, and its counter messages (as Pearson did), I feel the Spirit and my life is richer and holier.

I'm a pragmatist, but since we can't ever know what Jesus really said, for me, a theology based on "truth" is one that primarily uses the story of the woman taken in adultery to teach us how to forgive, one that makes life kinder, gentler, and "spiritual." Since the tale is in our cannon scripture, we have to do something with it (and there are a lot of perplexing verses that we must also deal with). If some take a text literally and others don't, big deal. What is important is right living. I find biblical scholarship very helpful in improving one's theology, especially in correcting loony concepts and assumptions, but eventually we must return to scripture itself as the authority on how we should live, for the metaphors that should shape our relationship with the Divine. A man or woman should ultimately read the Sermon on the Mount as God's call to his or her self, not just as a redaction of the first-generation's theology by the anonymous author of the book titled Matthew.

Thanks to Carol Lynn Pearson for making the Spirit's call in scripture live today.

SCOTT BALDWIN
Carmel, CA

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Why strict religious demands make a religion stronger and more attractive.

THE FREE-RIDER PROBLEM

FREE-RIDER PROBLEMS ARE THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF collective activities. Michael Hechter summarizes the free-rider problem as follows. “Truly rational actors will not join a group to pursue common ends when, without participating, they can reap the benefit of other people's activity in obtaining them. If every member of the relevant group can share in the benefits . . . then the rational thing is to free ride . . . rather than to help attain the corporate interest.” The consequence is, of course, that insufficient collective goods are created because too few contribute. Everyone suffers—but those who give most generously suffer the most. Let me state this as a proposition: *Religion involves collective action, and all collective action is potentially subject to exploitation by free riders.*

One need not look far to find examples of anemic congregations plagued by free-rider problems—a visit to the nearest liberal Protestant church usually will suffice to discover “members” who draw upon the group for weddings, funerals, and (perhaps) holiday celebrations, but who provide little or nothing in return. Even if they do make substantial financial contributions, they weaken the group's ability to create collective religious goods because their inactivity devalues the compensators and reduces the “average” level of commitment. . . . This perverse dynamic threatens all groups engaged in the production of collective goods, and it pertains to social and psychic benefits such as enthusiasm and solidarity no less than to material resources. It would seem that religions are caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, a congregational structure that relies on the collective action of numerous volunteers is needed to make the religion credible. On the other hand, that same congregational structure threatens to undermine the level of commitment and contributions needed to make a religious group effective. However, costly demands offer a solution.

SACRIFICE AND STIGMA

THE costly demands in question are not simply monetary costs analogous to the purchase price of secular goods. They are instead what at first glance would seem to be gratuitous costs, the *stigmas* and *sacrifices* common to sects, cults, and other “deviant” religious groups. Religious *stigmas* consist of all aspects of social deviance that attach to membership in the group. A group may prohibit some activities deemed normal in the external society (drinking, for example), or it may require other activities deemed abnormal for the world (shaving one's head, for example). By meeting these demands, members deviate from the norms of the surrounding society. *Sacrifices* consist of investments (material and human) and forgone opportunities required of those who would gain and retain membership in the group. . . . At first glance it would seem that costly demands must always make a religion less attractive. . . . To the contrary, costly demands strengthen a religious group by mitigating “free-rider” problems that otherwise lead

to low levels of member commitment and participation: *Sacrifice and stigma mitigate the free-rider problems faced by religious groups.*

They do so for two reasons. First, they create a barrier to group entry. No longer is it possible merely to drop in and reap the benefits of membership. To take part at all, you must qualify by accepting the stigmas and sacrifices demanded from everyone. Thus high costs tend to *screen out* free riders. . . . The costs act as nonrefundable registration fees that, as in secular markets, measure seriousness of interest in the product. Only those willing to pay the price qualify.

Second, high costs tend to *increase* participation among those who do join. Group members find that the temptation to free ride is weaker, not because their human nature has somehow been transformed, but rather because the opportunities to free ride have been reduced and (in equilibrium) the payoff of involvement has been substantially increased. If we may not attend dances or movies, play cards, go to taverns, or join fraternal organizations, we will eagerly await the Friday church social.

The dynamics of stigma and sacrifice have the following direct and formal consequences. First: *By demanding higher levels of stigma and sacrifice, religious groups induce higher average levels of member commitment and participation.* Second: *By demanding higher levels of stigma and sacrifice, religious groups are able to generate greater material, social, and religious benefits for their members.*

At first glance it seems paradoxical that when the cost of membership increases, the net gains of membership increase too. But this is necessarily the case with collectively produced goods. Some examples may be helpful. The individual's positive experience of a worship service increases to the degree that the church is full, the members participate enthusiastically (everyone joins in the songs and prayers), and others express very positive evaluations of what is taking place. Thus as each member *pays* the costs of membership, each *gains* from higher levels of production of collective goods.

Furthermore, for a religious group, as with any organization, *commitment is energy*. That is, when commitment levels are high, groups can undertake all manner of collective actions, and these are in no way limited to the psychic realm. For example, because Mormons are asked to contribute not only 10 percent of their incomes, but also 10 percent of their time to the church, they are thereby enabled to lavish social services upon one another—many of the rewards for being a Mormon are entirely tangible.

These propositions lead to a critical insight, perhaps *the* critical insight: Membership in an expensive religion is, for many people, a “good bargain.” Conventional cost-benefit analysis alone suffices to explain the continued attraction of religions that impose sacrifices and stigmas upon their members.

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