THE CHURCH IS LIKE UNTO A HOTEL

The "RENOVATION" of the Hotel Utah into a Church office building is a metaphor for the changes happening in the Church at large (see the articles on the Church’s "Course Corrections," Sunstone 14:5).

On the outside, the hotel looks the same: the stately white stones topped by the flag, waving pioneer bee hive. Similarly, the appearances of the Church remain the same: it has the same offices, teachings, and auxiliary organizations.

But on the inside, the entire hotel is being gutted and replaced with a modern office complex—they are constructing a new building within the old shell. The old hotel—with its conferences, receptions, and restaurants—was an inviting and comfortable building; now, except for the restored lobby, the new building will be very bureaucratic and impersonal, and the public spaces (a theater and beginner genealogy research center) are designed for public relations. It is becoming a place where you go when you have a specific piece of Church business to conduct; it’s not a place you want to visit again and again.

The same is true of the insides of the new Church. Where the old Church was familial and communal, the new Church is procedural and individualistic. Its social support organizations have become programs where members are given assignments and told their duties. There is little occasion for kindness, comfort, or genuine and intimate interactions.

Yes, the old hotel facade will remain. Once a guest would sit in the lobby and marvel at its grandeur and also feel at home away from home; after the renovation, one can still sit in the lobby, but who feels very comfortable in even the nicest office lobby, let alone a visitor’s center?

GEOFFREY CANFIELD
Salt Lake City

ARROGANT BELIEFS

I joined the Church as a teenager without my parents. Over the next thirty years, I have known scores of young people who have joined the Church with all, some, or none of their family. I have encountered many parents with feelings similar to Mary Paulson Harrington’s ("Not Every Family Relojes to Have a Child go on a Mormon Mission," Sunstone 14:6). Here are some...
thoughts.

1. There is a tendency to generalize the negative behavior of individual Latter-day Saints to the entire Church membership. As a twenty-year-old man he could vote, incur debt, and enlist in the Army without parental consent. Yet the Harringtons felt he was dishonest to study the Church without their permission. To them, Jack was a liar. Therefore, all Mormons “believe that manipulating the truth is justified if it is a means toward the greater end of conversion.” From Jack’s point of view, he feared his family’s reaction and procrastinated the final confrontation. His parents’ negative behavior, when he finally worked up the courage to tell them, showed that his fears were well founded. There is more than one way to interpret Jack’s motives. It is unlikely he is a liar. It is also untrue that a tenet of his new religion is dishonest.

2. There is a great gulf of misunderstanding between Latter-day Saints and other religions. Particularly in Utah, outsiders interpret Mormons’ oneness and sense of community as cliquish, closed-minded, and provincial—un-American. On the other hand, Mormons assume that Protestants and Catholics are not truly committed to their faith, that they do not have spiritual experiences, and that their belief stems from false traditions. The Harringtons think Jack joined the Church because he needed friends. People seldom make such serious commitments, creating rifts in their families, because they are lonely. Coupled with the deep sense of belonging that is such a rich part of the Mormon experience, Jack had a spiritual confirmation that led him to make the difficult choices he made. Apparently the Harringtons made no effort to comprehend this spiritual dimension to Jack’s conversion. Conversely, Jack’s LDS friends failed to understand the Harringtons’ sense of loss.

3. Why are Mormons “arrogant” about their beliefs, but Protestants aren’t? Mary tells us Jack had spent twenty very active years in his family’s church. Yet, she considered this insufficient background for him to compare religions. She wanted to know why his study hadn’t included talking to “his pastor of years and other clergy.” In the prayer she read at Jack’s missionary farewell, Harrington said, “Help us to avoid the arrogance of believing there is only one right approach to your loving care. Grant us open minds to learn more of your truth, from whatever source... May we each hold to the integrity of our own beliefs, and may those beliefs be in accordance with the teachings of Jesus the Christ.” But, the sword cuts both ways. Why does Jack need an open mind, but his parents don’t? Why are the Harringtons showing their integrity by holding to their beliefs, but Jack isn’t?

I agree with Harrington that Mormons need to “realize there are people other than themselves who devotedly believe in their own church.” It would be appropriate for her and her associates to do the same. She looks forward to a time when “sharing of integrity, appreciation, kindness, and respect between people of different faiths” could result in more fellowshipping between the faiths. This worthy goal will require some soul searching and attitude changing by Latter-day Saints. But it will never happen until people like the Harringtons stop accusing Mormons of dishonesty and start accepting Jack’s faithful volunteer service to his church to be as valid as his brother’s.

MICHAEL RAYBACK
Boulder, CO
COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

My life in the LDS church has never been easy for my pride, especially when I occasionally long for the ministerial robes, a pulpit, a large stone sanctuary, a wealthy congregation, and the praise of men. But it was Mormonism that helped me to recognize the true graces of life and of religion: love, a greater understanding of the mission of Jesus Christ, service, wisdom, continuing revelation, a sense of eternal priorities, and tolerance for the differing beliefs of others. I don't know how I would have done without knowing and living the differences between my former faith and this one. I often pity my children because they have been born in the covenant, not knowing how another faith system operates (with its own dysfunctions).

I empathize with Mary Harrington's feelings about her son's conversion to Mormonism. I know what my mother went through when I left the ministry and joined a "non-Christian church." She prayed diligently and received the answer that I "was in good hands." Even though she has never joined the LDS church, she got an answer—and relative peace in her heart. I often wonder how I would feel if one of my children converted to another faith. I think I know the answer: I would love that son or daughter on the side of mercy and understanding. Knowing how limited my perspective on reality is, I have no other wise choice.

GARY P. GILLEM
Springville, UT

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

The non-Mormons who move to Utah reasonably expect that some Mormons will become their "friends." One such Utah emigrant, Elise Lazar ("A Non-Mormon in Zion: A Stranger in Paradise," Sunstone 15:2), noted how the "emotional and religious orientation" of Mormons creates another barrier toward friendship. It seems that in order to be appeased, emigrants to Utah would have Mormons learn their language, adopt their ways and customs, keep themselves abreast of everything that happens in the world, and become more this-world conscious so that they would be more compatible with the "gentiles" who live in their community.

As Mormons, it is not our purpose to pander to the world so that we might gain their favor and friendship. We have no interest in pursuing knowledge of the superficial events which take place in the world at the sacrifice of knowledge of those things that contribute to the fulfillment of our purpose in life. We have no interest in changing our focus from eternity to temporality. It would be a diminution of our spiritual integrity.

As Mormons, it is incumbent upon us to love our neighbors to the extent that we render unto them kindness, patience, respect, forgiveness, tolerance of faults or beliefs, assistance in need, charity, and that we practice every virtue in our relations with them. It is also incumbent upon us to lift our voices in warning and in witness of the truths which we possess and to expose them to the light which we have. Moreover, it is required of us to receive, without criticism or rancor, our neighbors' attempts to dissuade us from our "misguided" acceptance of the "myths and fables" of Mormonism.

The world has moved in on the Mormons but it cannot expect the Mormons to move in on the world. It cannot expect us to be unconcerned when the world's children mingle their world-oriented views with the spirit-oriented views of our children. Those who expect to "modernize" Mormons expect in vain. It should be obvious to Mormons that non-Mormons do not possess their spiritual knowledge. It is this peculiarity, this testimony, that estranges non-Mormons from Mormons. There can never be an honest friendship between the children of light and the children of darkness.

Thus, to the non-Mormons among us we say, "We love you, but we cannot experience the same joy in your presence that we experience in the presence of those who share the same light which we share. Thus, the Mormons can be forgiven for their "unfriendliness" which in reality is spiritual integrity.

JOSEPH E. WYSON
Las Vegas

LOCAL TALK

I was interested in Elise Lazar's description of walking with her Mormon neighbors who primarily talked about Church matters.

When I was in my late forties and my Church and family responsibilities eased, I joined the American Association of University Women to get some intellectual stimulation. Surprisingly, their general meetings were just like Relief Society work meetings. Later, I joined an AAUW book group whose members had been meeting together since they were brides. I was twenty years younger than any of them and they treated me as if I were sixteen. The discussions tended to drift into personal reminiscences. "Do you remember when Lucy met Margaret Mitchell at ...?" I transferred to another book group and enjoyed some bright, challenging...
reviews and discussions. I was asked to review a Mormon book and chose The Mormon Experience. It was the time of the Equal Rights Amendment and I was certain that these women would ask me some penetrating questions about the LDS church's stand on the ERA, but no one mentioned the ERA, so I brought it up. Two women remarked that they disagreed with the Mormon stand, but they didn’t want to discuss it or to challenge their friend’s opinions. Most of the women knew nothing about it and weren’t interested.

After living in “gentile country” for thirty-seven years, I’ve concluded that human nature is much the same everywhere. Some people like to talk about ideas, but most people like to talk about family or personal experiences.

JOYCE N. WOODBURY
Scotia, NY

TRUE KNOWLEDGE

I HOPE SUNSTONE is not prejudiced against conservative Mormons. I’m a new subscriber and I really didn’t know what to expect from the magazine. The April 1991 SUNSTONE was a disappointment. Where was a nice long article from Hugh Nibley, Avraham Gileadi, Cleon Skousen, or H. Verlan Andersen? Saints such as these, and others like them, literally have their fingers on the pulse of the Lord’s true church.

Our Savior is coming a lot sooner than most Church members think. There are many good Protestants and Catholics who are aware of this fact and will be ahead of the sleeping Mormons. The Lord has told us to live out of the world, but to send missionaries into the world to be a voice of warning. If we were living out of the world, humbly depending upon the Holy Spirit, members would not be losing faith. Living in the world is the downfall of the Saints, and sending our children to schools taught by priestcraft is the downfall of our children. We are not here to follow the causes of the world.

There is only one cause, and the Holy Spirit will teach and guide us into that way—God’s way—if we are sincere and worthy in asking. How many of us understand the gift of the Holy Ghost? How many of us are using it constantly daily to teach and guide ourselves? How many kneel in humble prayer to ask our Heavenly Father to teach us by his Holy Spirit until our understanding can reach into heaven? There is no disillusionment when a testimony is fed continually by the Holy Spirit's guidance. It is the Saints who have forsaken God; he has not really don’t feel your publication justifies the amount it takes to publish it, although I do feel it is important to be informed and use discernment.

LA PRELE OLSN
Richfield, UT

THE PRIME FOCUS

I SUBSCRIBED TO SUNSTONE because I wanted the George P. Lee letters offered in the promotion. I’m a bit disappointed. There have been a few inspirational articles worth reading, but for the most part the writers appear to be intellectuals who want to impose their own thoughts and views on the readers. They should realize that the whole Church is under condemnation for failing to read the Book of Mormon. The Holy Spirit is the only “intellectualism” a truly spiritual person can possess.

The whole Church is under condemnation for failing to read the Book of Mormon. The Holy Spirit is the only “intellectualism” a truly spiritual person can possess. SUNSTONE was a disappointment. Where was a nice long article from Hugh Nibley, Avraham Gileadi, Cleon Skousen, or H. Verlan Andersen? Saints such as these, and others like them, literally have their fingers on the pulse of the Lord’s true church.

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including statements seem much closer to the true character of our people: “You have to be careful what you ask a Mormon to do,” he said, because “he’ll do it.” Such a statement would have played well in the Germany of the 1930s and 1940s.

Brother Monson’s bold declaration that “We [LDS] don’t believe in marches and protests and carrying placards” reveals an amazing lack of understanding of American history, as well as of the individuals civic and moral responsibility to take a stand against wickedness and error by peaceful means. Even more troublesome is his apparent lack of appreciation for those few LDS souls who consider themselves conscientious objectors.

One of the most compelling truths revealed by Joseph Smith was that free agency is a gift from God. The Prophet also taught that with every gift comes a responsibility. The truth of this revelation, which apparently escapes Bother Monson, is that the exercise of free agency and moral responsibility are intensely personal matters. What is written in one’s heart is not to be wrapped in a flag, nor is it to be affirmed or rationalized away in patriotic rhetoric of authority, in any of its human forms. The Nuremburg Trials after World War II taught us that claims of loyalty or duty to flag or country cannot absolve an individual of the responsibility to act righteously in a moral crisis. The scriptures teach us no less. “There fore to him [or her] that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him [or her] it is sin” (James 4:17).

The formula, then, is simple: If one’s heart tells one that a war, or war in general, is wrong, it is wrong and should be opposed by any peaceful means available. Government and ecclesiastical claims on the individual notwithstanding, the only appropriate and certain guide in matters of moral responsibility is the human heart moved upon by the Holy Spirit. Gandhi put it best: “The only tyrant I accept in this world is the ‘still small voice’ within.”

Michael R. & Jennifer Warwick
Cascade, ID

ONWARD, CHRISTIAN PEACEMAKERS

Thank you for Eugene England’s “On Trusting God, Or Why We Should Not Fight Iraq” (Sunstone 14:5). One member of the Albany Ward found that it was not popular to be a peace person during the recent Persian Gulf War. The prayers in ward meetings did not seem to reflect loving one’s enemies enough to pray for both sides of the conflict (see Matthew 5:43-48).

This Brother has been an active LDS for nearly thirty years and came to his peace testimony through personal study of the Sermon on the Mount in 1967, at age sixteen. For two years during the Vietnam War he served as an official conscientious objector doing hospital work. His service was almost a secret, because it seemed that LDS people did not like to hear about it, even if Church leaders officially approved of it.

His own testimony of peace led him to participate with Quaker friends in their silent vigils for peace and justice. On some Sundays he visited with the Albany Friends’ meeting for worship, where all were praying for peace and were sensitive to both sides.

Additional opportunities for peace activities came during a large march, demonstration, moment of silence, and die-in in Albany on February 21. The next opportunity for service was when a call went out to help young people who could be drafted. Our Brother attended and offered his experience as a conscientious objector. He told them that he was a “Mormon-Quaker.” Others were “Catholic-Quakers,” etc; all were bound together by their peace testimony.

Why does a Mormon have to go out in “exile” from his ward during a war? When rhetoric, prayers, or music in the ward do not seem to look to peace or are biased toward one side of a conflict, that spirit does not make peace people feel welcome. How about a rewrite: “Onward, Christian Peacemakers, Marching on to Peace?”

Our worship should reflect a true love of God, neighbor, and self. Prayers for peace and safety of all people can be offered. Music of an uplifting, non-militant spiritual nature will help. Remember that all nations and peoples are children of the same Heavenly Father and that a “them and us” attitude is inappropriate. Talks and scripture readings could emphasize peaceful situations as examples for Christian living, rather than any violent situations.

Our Brother wishes that a Peace Bible could be made of all passages about peace from the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, the Koran, other holy books, and good literature. Gandhi said that he learned his tolerance for other faiths by learning from their holy books. Peace hymns could be added, especially, “Let There be Peace on Earth and Let it Begin With Me.”

Loren Fay
Albany, NY

ANNALEE SKARIN

In response to “A Daughter’s Response or the Inside View” by Hope A. Hilton (Sunstone 15:1), I would like to say the following, since Annalee Skarin was also my mother.

I lived in that wonderful home for twenty-one years. I was sixteen years old when my mother left home in 1943. I have only happy memories of what transpired there.

My sister, Hope Hilton, told me a few years ago that her purpose in life was to prove to the world that our mother was insane so that God would hold Annalee blameless for her actions. Where is the proof of insanity? Is there a doctor’s report? No, only my sister’s diagnosis and words over and over again. Only her own bitter opinions, mostly developing from her shattered pride when our mother was excommunicated in 1952.
I would like to put the facts straight. It is false that my mother reverenced the mother superior or the Catholic nuns at the school where she taught. I remember that her remarks upon this subject were always in the negative. Nor would she have anything to do with the supernatural. When that subject came up, there was always a negative lecture for us.

My father earned the money and paid the bills, and then he paid tithing on what money was left. Once, when we were heavily in debt, my mother begged my father to let her pay the bills, and she promised that she would get the debts straightened out. He finally gave in, and the first thing she did was pay a full tithing—ten percent on the gross earnings. She always bore a beautiful testimony to us on the value of tithing and how she got the family out of debt by honoring this principle.

As far as I understand, my mother's only personal connection with Aimee Semple MacPhearson was that they attended school together. Aimee never was her role model. Hope wrote that there was never talk of a family reunion. Travel in the 1930s was not so easy to come by when her family was spread over four different states. Family members were all poor and hard-pressed for money. But how can my sister forget my mother's family reunion in Salt Lake City and our many trips to Mesa, Arizona, where we stayed with Annalee's sister, Eda? We also made visits to her other sisters out of state.

Hope calls my mother "a loner," which is strange indeed. My mother was not a social butterfly, nor did she care for parties, but as far as being a loner, never! Our home was constantly filled with her personal friends who knew and loved her.

I have never met a happier person in my life or a person who radiated more love and joy than my mother.

LINDA LEE AVARELL MOAT
Duchesne, UT

IN ANNALEE'S DEFENSE

As a long time admirer of Annalee Skarin, I have read all of Annalee's books, and any other material I could locate about her in the hope of understanding the whole phenomenon. I have also made it a point to get to know both of her daughters, Hope and Linda, in an attempt to unravel the mystery of Annalee Skarin.

I was introduced to her writings in 1971 when a Jewish friend who was a psychologist asked me to read Ye Are Gods and then demanded to know why the Mormon church would excommunicate such a wonderful woman. I had no answers, as I found Annalee's book very inspiring. Her books have inspired numerous readers over the years and the ones I have met were truth seekers and discerning people of all ages. Can all of us be wrong?

It is hard to understand Hope's extreme feelings about her mother and her need to discredit Annalee's life's work when Linda feels just the opposite. Linda had a very close bond with her mother because of her early illness and miraculous healing and the accompanying vision which they experienced together. Perhaps Hope felt left out.

VIRGINIA BOURGEOUS
Syracuse, UT

IN LOO OF MEETINGS

Through more than fifty years of Church activity, I have always tried to be obedient to my Heavenly Father and also to my various branch presidents and bishops. I never coveted the priesthood—like Eliza, I have usually managed to persuade the Brethren who preside over me to see it my way when it really mattered.

But now I'm in rebellion. Apostasy, maybe. They won't listen, and they won't do anything about my problem. I've read all the LDS feminist literature I can lay my hands on, though being exiled in one of the second-rate Zions invented after the real Zion filled up, this isn't a lot. But in all my reading, I've never yet seen an article which dealt with the most vital issue of all—the block schedule and the way it discriminates against women.

Five minutes they've given us! Five minutes between Sunday School and Relief Society. Five minutes between Relief Society and sacrament meeting. All I can say is, the prophet must have a stronger bladder than I've got, and the architects who design our chapels are all males without mothers, wives, or daughters.

Church activity figures are not released, but any observer in practically any ward can see that priesthood meeting is the only meeting where men outnumber women. In our small ward, I am privileged to sit on the stand in sacrament meeting and wave my arms four
times each Sunday, to the delight of the babies (no one else ever watches). From this vantage point, I have kept count and can confidently say that in our ward the average attendance is sixty percent female and forty percent male—seventy females and fifty males. But do the bathroom facilities reflect these figures?

To service the needs of these women and girls plus five small boys, we have two cubicles and five minutes! In contrast, my male spy tells me that there are three facilities for the remaining forty-five males to “make themselves comfortable.”

What happens, of course, is that women and children wander in and out of meetings at a rate I’ve never seen before. What else can they do? For those Sisters who are teaching, conducting, playing the organ, or speaking in sacrament meeting, the time schedule is a nightmare as we try to put up hymn numbers, write on the blackboard, or play the prelude as well as visit the rest room during the five minute break. Perhaps I have hit on the real explanation for the increasing tendency to refuse Church callings and even for falling attendance figures.

I haven’t conducted a Church-wide survey of toilet facilities. Perhaps it’s only in our 1950s-vintage chapel where this inequity exists. There is scope here for much sociological and feminist research. Meanwhile, no way will I do any missionary work and risk being and salvation of their Lamanite enemies were so hard of heart that God could not correct them without using force against their agency?

A better answer may be that racism is not of itself evil. Racism is often evilly exploited, as any good in this world can be, but it may be that God is, in fact, a benevolent racist. Race does matter to him; he created it. God welcomes all people of every race, color, and gender into his kingdom on the identical basis of faith and repentance. That does not change the fact that all groups are not treated the same or even equally by God. This is an historical, scriptural, and observable fact.

God is just not “Politically Correct.”

Don S. Redd
Layton, UT

THE HISTORICAL BETTY CROCKER

I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT be interested in a letter I found when I was going through the papers of A. P. Apocryphal.

Mark McKiernan
Independence, MO

A. P. Apocryphal
Box 1059
Independence, MO 64051

Dear Uncle A. P.:

I promised you I would report on the Mormon History Association Conference I attended at Pomona College in California. The main session was on the Book of Abraham, and I got lost among the theological confrontations of the participants. But I found I could use some of their methodical arguments in my search to find the “historical Betty Crocker.” Several debatable questions come to mind.

Question One: Was there really a woman named Betty Crocker who wrote the Betty Croc-
ker Cookbook?

The Crocker fundamentalists who believe in the historical Crocker claim to have several pictures of her during the different phases of life. There is one in my cookbook, and I remember seeing others on cake mixes when I was a child. They look like someone's mother ought to have looked like me.

The Crocker fundamentalists argue that there was a real person named Betty Crocker. She wrote the famous cookbook that bears her name. She made a major contribution to the nourishment and better health of 20th century America. Millions ate better because of her. Holiday meals felt her impact as did the Sunday dinner after church. She was a blessing to everyone who ever went back for seconds.

Question Two: Is it the cookbook or the historical person which is the most important?

Certain Crocker modernists, sometimes lumped in the liberal label, argue that Betty Crocker, at best, was just a cook. The cookbook is filled with recipes that you and I can use to feed our families, nourish the famished, please the palate, and provide enough hot chicken soup for everyone in the neighborhood. The cookbook sustained the eternal principles of the Basic Four Food Groups. One could live longer and eat better if one just followed it. According to the liberals, it is the cookbook and not the cook that has lasting importance.

Question Three: Is the Betty Crocker Cookbook pseudographa?

Many Crocker revisionists claim that the Cookbook was not written by Betty Crocker, but rather by a nameless group of food chemists and nutritionists. If the Crocker revisionists are correct about this, then there is no need for Betty Crocker to have written the Cookbook even if there was a historical Betty Crocker.

I must admit, uncle A. P., that these arguments get a little complex for a fellow from Eastern Jackson County. However, I did read the Betty Crocker Cookbook cover to cover in my youth. Much to the chagrin of those teaching my cooking course, I spent too much time on the dessert chapters which threatened to distort my application of the Basic Four Food Groups. I was always a sucker for a double-layer chocolate cake. I still have guilt feelings about it.

I was a child. They look like someone's mother ought to have looked like me. I remember seeing others on cake mixes when I was a child. They look like someone's mother ought to have looked like me.

I think a panel discussion made up of the various Crocker schools would make a good program for the next Mormon History Conference to be held in St. George, Utah. We could get a noted food scholar to chair the session. I believe that such a session on the "Search for the Historical Betty Crocker"

would be of greater academic value than the session I heard on the Book of Abraham. Someday someone may find evidence of the "historic Betty Crocker," and I want to know about it when she does. Until then, I will have to take the whole thing on a "leap of faith."

Your Nephew,
A. Z. Always

GENDER TENSIONS

I read THE exchange of letters on the "Judges" episode in Carol Lynn Pearson's Mother Wove the Morning with interest (SUNSTONE 14:4 and 14:6). I see the deeper issue as questioning whether sexism is inherent in the Judeo-Christian-Mormon tradition (a disease in the roots and therefore the whole plant) or whether it is merely deviant (reflecting a sickness in the branches).

The undercurrent in the letters puts me in mind of J. A. Phillips's Eve: The History of an Idea, or Joan Smith's Misogynies, or Andrea Dworkin's "Women Hating." Such writers confront me with long lists of male atrocities and insist that such evil is inherent in my religion and maleness. I sympathize with the frustration from male atrocities and recognize that venting frustration is healthy. Telling atrocity stories creates tension, but how does that tension function? Is it to motivate change, to raise consciousness, to punish the guilty gender for their gender, to generate rage, to create divisions, or to justify separation? If I want to escape the tension, do I repent in my faith or repent of my faith? As a male, am I being told, "you never do anything right, you never can and never will" or "you've done wrong and can and should do better." Asking whether misogynistic acts occur is valid, but I think that for some feminist critics, the bogey man of sexist and sexually uptight Christianity provides an all-too-external evil, an all-too-convenient scapegoat, an all-too-comical prudery, an all-too-convenient self-justification, and an all-too-ready excuse for separation from men. If Christianity is inherently sexist, and if self-definition of gender roles is seen as the first and great value in life (never mind whether Jesus is the Christ, or Joseph a prophet), then Christianity with all its frustrations and obligations is a thing beyond reform, fit only to be uprooted and discarded.

Phillips and Smith say, "The branches are sick, so the roots must be rotten." But Jolene Edmunds Rockwood's "The Redemption of Eve" (in Sisters In Spirit) and Eileen Pagels's Adam, Even, and the Serpent say "The branches may be sick, but the roots are good." Having read Rockwood and Margaret Toscano's "Beyond Patriarchy, Beyond Matriarchy," my reaction to the catalogue of male atrocities is different than it might otherwise be.

Just as the emotional shocks from highlighting male atrocities blinds some critics to the possibility of positive approaches, so does uncritical veneration of tradition binds
some conservatives to overlook, justify, or rationalize malignant situations.

There are startling potentials in the Judeo-Christian-Mormon tradition — potentials about which the most virulent critics seem to know nothing. Why not tell the liberal critics about the male-female cherubim in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of Christ, which represented “The face of God,” and also discuss the Judeo-Christian Goddess tradition (see Raphael Patai’s The Hebrew Goddess). Why not tell them about the non-sexist thought that Eileen Pagels and Hugh Nibley document at the earliest strata of Christianity? Why not show how Mary Magdalene’s weeping and seeking after Jesus fulfilled a widespread and ancient Near East tradition in which the Goddess seeks after her dead consort, and through her ministrations, makes the resurrection possible? Why not talk about Wisdom/Sophia as names of the Goddess, and how the Goddess is named in the Book of Mormon (Mosiah 8), with the lament that we will not seek after Wisdom and serve her?

Why not go to the conservatives with the constructive message that their interpretations have no legitimate basis in the faith, but derive from cultural overlay? Tell them that gender dominance is characteristic of a fallen state, not of the divine order. Urge them to repent in their faith. Entreat them to discard the sick branches and connect with the healthy roots.

I also question the appropriateness of evaluating all relationships in terms of the male/female tension. If your only tool is a hammer, you treat the world like it is a nail. As an alternative and adjunct to the feminist hammer of male atrocities, why not add to the relationship toolbox something like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which describes sixteen basic personality types, all with unique tendencies, gifts, and weaknesses. In our marriage, while my wife and I have had discussions about our roles and expectations, the dominant dynamic has not been gender or priesthood, but personal. According to the Myers-Briggs indicators, my four main personality preferences are Introverted Intuitive Feeling Perceptive (INFP), Shauna’s are Extroverted Intuitive Feeling Perceptive (ENFP). For us, learning to understand the tension generated by my flavor of Introversion and her flavor of Extroversion has taken lots of work; we’ve spent less work on gender/role/culture issues and almost none on priesthood issues. Intellectually, it never occurred to me to make priesthood an issue, and, as an INFP, I’m temperamentally unsuited to do so. As an INFP must I take heat from feminists for what an Extroverted Sensing Thinking Judging (ESTJ) male in a Church leadership role did while guided by theological and cultural assumptions that I do not share, just because we share the same gender? Since studies show that 60 percent of management positions are held by ESTJ types, might not feminist complaints and characterizations of men be overly slanted by the tendencies and weaknesses of highly visible, but not comprehensively representative types? When women do get the priesthood, will the female ESTJ-manager types be all that different from their counterpart males?

Attaining Zion requires a one-ness (not uniformity) of heart and mind. I believe that the same leaders who would resist tooth and nail attempts to uproot their faith will someday cheerfully set to work with branch clippers, if they have attractive reasons to do so. A deep understanding of the reasons for another person’s differences can illuminate his or her validity and worth, and can often change your perception of those differences. Sometimes, what had been experienced as a frustrating negation can turn into beauty and variety, a dance of complementary contrasts whose comprehension Eve recognized as the prerequisite to joy.

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DESIRES OF THE HEART

I READILY AGREE with Joseph B. Romney’s letter (“Heterodoxy,” Sunstone 14:6) that “God does not . . . create a deep, permanent desire in certain hearts toward improper heterosexual behavior.” At the same time, I also support David Lach’s implication (“On What authority?” Sunstone 14:3) that God may indeed “create a deep, permanent desire in certain hearts” toward homosexual behavior. I have no conflict in supporting both of these assertions because, as should be obvious to even the casual reader, they are not parallel statements. Romney apparently did not notice that he inserted the limiting adjective “improper” when referring to heterosexual behavior, yet allowed his reference to homosexual behavior to stand as all inclusive. The deficiency in this unexamined position is that it ignores exactly what Lach postulates: that is, “a morally responsible use of [homosexual] sex.”

Why is it so impossible for Church members and leaders to conceive that there
may be a proper, righteous, and God-sanctioned expression of physical love between two individuals of the same gender? Stranger things have happened. Joseph Smith contended: "That which is wrong under one circumstance may be and often is right under another." Indeed, is there anything else under the sun that Mormons hold so categorically wrong? Certainly not murder, not war, not lying, not stealing, not incest, not heterosexual behavior outside the marriage covenant, not even offering up your daughter to be gang raped by a mob. We have scriptural and historical records of all these acts where God either ordered them, or blessed those who committed them, or withheld blessings from those who refused to commit them. Why is it so difficult to see that it is not the act itself which is important to God, but the circumstances under which an act is performed? "This is the principle," says Joseph, "upon which the government of heaven is conducted: by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed." He continues:

If we seek the kingdom of God, all good things will be added. So it was with Solomon: first he asked wisdom, and God gave it to him, and with it every desire of his heart, even things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part; but which in reality were right because god gave and sanctioned by special revelation.

Read this carefully. It says that some desire of Solomon's heart might be considered abominable to those who have only a partial understanding of the order of heaven. Does anyone in the Church today claim to understand the order of heaven in full? I have not heard so. Abraham, Moses, the Brother of Jared, and a few others reported having been shown all things from the beginning to the end, and the Prophet Joseph exclaimed "visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind." But other than these now-dead prophets, no one claims to have seen and understood it all. Indeed, just the opposite is true. We hold that the Restoration is a process; that God "will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Given our admittedly partial understanding of the order of heaven, anyone now living might be quick to judge the desires of Solomon's heart as abominable. Certainly most members of the Church have no hesitancy to judge the desires of their homosexual Brothers' and Sisters' hearts as abominable. Can Saints be so smug? Can we be so sure that such desires are not, as Joseph indicated, "in reality right because God gave and sanctioned [them] by special revelation?" Lest any heterosexual in the Church object that he or she has not received such a special revelation, remember that "revelation [is] adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed." Alma also explained that "all things [were] made known [unto the Nephites] according to their desires, and their faith and prayers, of that which has been, and which is, and which is to come" (Alma 9:20, emphasis added). Whatever its roots, and they are probably many and intertwining, sexual orientation is a permanent and enduring feature of an individual's personality. Homosexual orientation is impervious to treatment—be it fasting, prayer, electric shock, or baseball. It easily qualifies as one of the "circumstances" of one's life. Why, then, would God reveal the proper and righteous use of homosexual expression to those who are heterosexually inclined? They haven't been placed in a homosexual circumstance; they have neither the desire nor the need to know.

What heterosexual members of the Church do need is a little less arrogance and much greater charity toward their gay Brothers and lesbian Sisters. After the 1978 revelation concerning blacks and the priesthood, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught us to see deeper meaning in 2 Nephi 25:33: "and he inviteth all to come unto him and 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." "Many of us," remarked Elder McConkie, "never imagined that these passages had the extensive and broad meaning that they do have." As the restoration of all things nears completion, is it so impossible to think that we may one day hear this same scripture expounded upon from the pulpit of the tabernacle to include "both gay and straight"? When at last we on earth do understand the order of heaven in full, Romney and those who feel as he does may be found repeating the other words Elder McConkie spoke on that occasion: "Forget everything that I . . . or whomever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding. . . ."

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