

Marmot Mating Habits

Remember my little story "Out in Left Field" in the spring 1992 issue? It was the one where I thought my hairdresser said that her husband studied Mormons but she really said marmots. In the story I asked about the professor her husband studied with and she said that it was Professor Armitage, "he's world famous."

I sent the story to Dr. Kenneth Armitage and he wrote back. I thought your readers would enjoy what he said. Some of his letter follows:

"[It is most amazing] that a similar experience happened to one of my current students, Carmen Halsbury. She was getting some physical therapy when the therapist asked what she did and Carmen replied she studied marmots. You guessed it, the therapist heard Mormon and the confusion quickly mounted.

"Carmen was surprised and pleased that the therapist was so curious and interested so she continued to answer all her questions. The amazement grew when Carmen told her she followed the males to watch their mating habits and that she put radio transmitters in their abdominal cavity. The therapist was really taken aback at that and asked how Carmen got them to let her do it.

"Carmen replied 'no problem,' she'd just trap them, put them under

with drugs and then let them go the next day."

Joleen Ashman Robison
Lawrence, Kansas

Fundamentally Christian

I found Tim B. Heaton's "Demographics of the Contemporary Mormon Family" (Fall 1992) interesting. It clarified some points and confirmed others. However, I noted one potentially large problem in his designations of various religious groups.

Heaton lists various Protestant groups and includes "Fundamentalists" as a separate group. Perhaps he is simply not aware of what Fundamentalism is.

Originally, the fundamentalist movement (which had at the time not yet been capitalized) was exactly that—a movement that spanned a large spectrum of Christian denominations. It did not seek to found churches or denominations, or to define any one church or denomination as "the only true church," but rather to call Christians of all denominations back to intelligent but confirmed faith in the Bible as the very Word of God. Although Fundamentalism today has lost some of the characteristics of this original movement, and taken to itself other characteristics that would have best been left alone (as well

as gained an uppercase F), its essential character is much the same.

I—a Southern Baptist—am a doctrinal fundamentalist. So are the Independent Baptists. Doctrinally, many Mennonites, members of the Assemblies of God, National Baptists, Bible Church people, charismatics, and others merit the label fundamentalist. Lorraine Beottner, an Orthodox Presbyterian; Charles Spurgeon, an English Baptist; John MacArthur, a contemporary non-denominational pastor; and Pat Robertson, the charismatic television personality have been or are all doctrinal fundamentalists. Indeed, some would place Mormons in the fundamentalist category, although I disagree with such a classification. But there is still no such thing as a “Fundamentalist Church.”

Thus by using “Fundamentalist” as a separate category, Heaton has possibly skewed the results. He is either dealing with a denomination of purely mythical proportions or removing fundamentalist members of various churches and denominations from their proper perspective and placing them in an artificially constructed category. I suspect that if the “Fundamentalists” had been included in the various Protestant denominations to which they actually belong, Heaton’s graphs would register different results than they do with the fundamentalists considered separately.

Robert McKay
Marlow, Oklahoma

Human Experience

I have resisted the urge to write to you many times, but the poem “The

Book Handed Her” by Anita Tanner (Winter 1993) was so lively and well-crafted that I had to put my thanks in writing. Like so many others, I am eternally grateful to be LDS, but found myself feeling like the proverbial “round peg” that those around me tried to put in a square hole.

I believe what has been the most beneficial to me has been the idea that we are “not human beings having a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience.” Many of your personal essays embody this philosophy. That thought has put new life into what had become at times, even on my mission, a stifling experience.

I read Anita Tanner’s poem on the way to work and found myself rejoicing at her brilliance in capturing the “oddness” of the human sexual experience. We all have those feelings and I will remember always the succinct and laughably-graphic manner in which she was able to achieve this.

Please pass my gratitude and admiration along to her.

Brian C. Allen
Murrieta, California

A Magazine Fan

Some of my member friends seem amused at the assortment of magazines fanned out on my coffee table: *Sunstone*, *Ensign*, *Dialogue*, and *The Friend*. I tell them I enjoy learning others’ viewpoints and widening my perspective. I usually feel uplifted by the church publications and edified by the others. I was surprised at feeling both uplifted and edified after reading Clem Bear Chief’s “Plucked from the Ashes.” Thank you

for including this poignant conversion story in *Dialogue*.

Ann Craft
Tahoe City, California

Incomplete Revelation

I was intrigued with Barbara Elliott Snedecor's "On Being Female: A Voice of Contentment" (Fall 1992), in which she suggests that the Holy Ghost might be considered the female element in the Godhead. The same question about the existence of a Heavenly Mother has plagued me: if she exists why doesn't she appear in the scriptures?

In *Mormon Doctrine*, Bruce R. McConkie states, "In this dispensation, at least, nothing has been revealed as to [the Holy Ghost's] origin or destiny; expressions on these matters are both speculative and fruitless." Since Mrs. Snedecor's comments are not about the origin or destiny of the Holy Ghost, but about its attributes, I hope that Brother McConkie would excuse both of us for a bit of conjecturing. It seems to me that ancient writers of the early scriptures, believing that women should possess compassion, sensitivity, and the urge to be co-creators in the universe, wanted them to be protected, even cloistered—not fully revealed to the public. Is it possible then that the very absence of complete revelation about the Holy Ghost is another indication that the Holy Ghost is the female principle in the Godhead?

In any case, the idea that the Holy Ghost is my Heavenly Mother makes me feel good.

Shirleen Mason Pope
Logan, Utah

New Dimension

As I read Barbara Elliott Snedecor's "On Being Female: A Voice of Contentment" (Fall 1992), I was intrigued by her suggestion that our Heavenly Mother may in fact be the Holy Ghost. I too have contemplated this theory. More than one researcher has demonstrated that the early Israelite culture believed in the divine triad of the Father-Mother-Son (Eugene Seaich, *Ancient Texts of Mormonism*, 13).

Heavenly Mother has been called by many names in both canonical scriptures as well as non-canonical writings. Those names include Asherah, Ashtoreth, Anath, Ishtar, Inanna, Sophia, Panim, and Wisdom (Seaich, 20b). As Jerrie W. Hurd has noted, "In Proverbs, Wisdom is presented as a female deity, not just grammatically but literally as the goddess who is the companion to God the Father (*Sunstone*, July 1985, 23). And, she points out, "The Hebrew word for 'God' takes three forms: 'el, which is masculine' Eloah, which is feminine, and Elohim, which is plural. All three forms are found in the Bible . . ." (24). Several non-Mormon scholars have also noted the early belief in a Mother Goddess, as evidenced in David Noel Freedman's article, "yahweh [God] of Samaria and his Asherah [wife]" (*Biblical Archaeologist* [Dec. 1987], 241).

Although Snedecor laughs at the idea that Heavenly Mother's name is not mentioned because of its sacredness, the possibility does exist that Heavenly Father does protect her name from the same obscenities with which his name and his son's are blasphemed. Seaich adds yet another possibility: "Undoubtedly, the real reason why such things were kept secret, and even removed from Israelite dogma, was the ever-pre-

sent danger of immoral behavior with the veneration of the Female. As William F. Albright once pointed out, the Mosaic Reform was not so much aimed at polytheism, *per se*, but against sexual depravity connected with worship of the gods and their spouses" (126).

As to the connection between Heavenly Mother and the Holy Ghost we note one translation of an ancient agnostic text: "Through the Holy Spirit (Sophia) we are indeed born, but we are born again through Christ" (Seach, 125). It is interesting that the term "born again" applies to the conversion through Holy Spirit.

Snedecor may be right. If Heavenly Mother is the Holy Spirit it adds a new dimension to our understanding of how the Holy Spirit communicates—through emotions, peaceful feelings, and the burning in the bosom. The nurturing tenderness of a mother toward a child must have a heavenly example. Development of this mother-child bond also might be viewed from a different perspective if this theory is correct. President Benson's admonition that women set their priorities upon their children may be sound and eternally progressive advice when viewed as direction for women seeking to emulate Heavenly Mother. If Heavenly Mother is the Holy Spirit we may have some understanding as to why, if our Heavenly Parents are supposedly flesh and bone beings, they give birth to spirit children. Of course this hypothesis may also renew the question of polygynous relations in the hereafter (a wife of flesh and bones and another of spirit—or maybe not).

Until the prophet reveals the Lord's will concerning details of either Heavenly Mother or the Holy Spirit, my convictions must rest on the firm foundation of revealed truths. I feel free to speculate, however, so long as my

speculation does not presume to transcend the words of the Lord's anointed, and so long as my theories don't interfere with my spiritual progression or the progression of my brothers and sisters.

Michael R. Ash
Ogden, Utah

A Sense of Healing

The spring 1993 issue of *Dialogue* was wonderful. Lavina Fielding Anderson's courageous essay will, I am sure, make many members of the church feel less alone. My husband and I were particularly moved by the cover. Somehow it continues to bring a sense of healing, embracing in a very spiritual way what this whole issue is all about.

Our heartfelt thanks to all the contributors, and to the editors and staff of *Dialogue*.

Irene M. Bates
Pacific Palisades

To Think for Themselves

It has been some time since journal articles have stimulated me the way the articles did in the spring 1993 issue of *Dialogue*. I think it is wonderful that there is a journal that will carry critical, maybe even denunciatory, articles about church leaders from time to time. The basic strength of the church is individual testimony, testimony of the gospel, not of individual leaders. Consecrated leaders do bad things from time to time, and it is good to call attention to their mistakes so that people will not confuse the gospel with individual

personalities.

I know of a high general authority who shocked everyone present by his insistent demands for better treatment as he was traveling. I later learned, however, that he was seriously ill and would soon die, so I understood his distress. On another occasion a friend of mine was dressed down angrily and profanely by a high-ranking church authority for being "stupid enough to deliver ice cream to the wrong door of the church office building." That faithful high priest could not forget such a tirade from a man he had revered as his appointed leader. In my youth I saw a high-ranking church authority abusively scold his son in anger for not getting on a horse the way the man thought he should. A lawyer friend of mine was shocked in his legal practice when he had to contend with a high-ranking church authority who used questionable means to get his way.

In my BYU classes I contended with some points in speeches of some authorities who were taking stands that could not hold up under close examination. Students were shocked to think that a teacher would question an authority. I thought it was my duty to point out their errors without attempting to discredit them as people of integrity. If there is any church that teaches its members to stand on their own feet and to think for themselves, it is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

So I was pleased to read Lavina Fielding Anderson's compilation of acts by authorities that have distressed her. People could read malice into her writing, but her final three or four pages negated it. Here is a woman who has been offended, and I am glad *Dialogue* gave her a chance to express herself. Paul Toscano's complaint was more angry and perhaps intemperate as he

called the general authorities to repentance.

Elbert Peck's response to Toscano was challenging and enlightening, and Eugene England's denunciation of "spectral" evidence, whether against members or authorities, was sound. But I think the best article in the whole issue was Richard Poll's response to Lavina Fielding Anderson. I hope Poll's essay will get the exposure his "Liahona and Iron Rod" essay has received. It is a masterful, sympathetic, and critical challenge to all who would venture into intellectualism.

As I read the complaints against general authorities, I thought of the authorities I have known on a personal basis. They didn't seem to measure up to the negative pictures that were painted. When I had occasion, as president of the board of directors of the BYU Credit Union, to contend with Dallin Oaks, then the school president, I couldn't change his mind, and he forced us to stop using BYU in our name, but in every way he was kind and rational. We had to agree to disagree, but neither of us had cause to have ill feelings toward the other.

I thought of Howard W. Hunter offering to carry our bags as we went to the airport to fly from New Caledonia to Sydney, and I thought of his response to a mission president who asked him about a knotty problem. He replied that he was glad it was the mission president's problem and not his, that the mission president had been called to solve such problems.

I thought of Bruce R. McConkie telling my wife and me after he had set us apart to preside over the Fiji Suva Mission that we would be far away from close church supervision and that would be good in that it would give us a free hand to run things the way we

thought they should be run. I thought of Jack H. Goasland, a bright, friendly, compassionate man who was so open to suggestions and so eager to be helpful as our area director. I thought of Rex Pinegar, my former student, who shed tears as he married the first Papua, New Guinea, couple ever to be married in a temple. I thought of the kindness and friendliness of my fellow missionaries Robert L. Simpson and Glen L. Rudd who both became general authorities, of my colleague Spencer W. Condie who still serves and who is such a good man in every way, of my former student Loren C. Dunn, and of understanding counsel from Paul H. Dunn when he was a general authority.

There are others I should name, but the tale gets too long. The point is that general authorities I have known have been among the best of men. Of course, they make mistakes, and some of them may become arrogant and even mean at times, but the idea that men like the ones I have known would establish a "Strengthening Church Members Committee" with any intent other than to help people with problems or to prevent unfair criticism of the church is beyond my understanding. Yet I realize that it is possible that such a committee in certain circumstances could set up a damaging "inquisition" if improperly used, and sometimes even good men can confuse righteousness with zeal.

Wilford E. Smith
Provo, Utah

Editors' Note

The spring 1993 issue of *Dialogue* has elicited considerable commentary, some favorable, some not. To date, most

of the discussion has centered on the cover art: Trevor Southey's triptych "Prodigal." The response to "Prodigal" clearly shows that *Dialogue's* readership is diverse, as we hoped it would be. Reactions have ranged from positive and supportive to negative and angry. We did not intend to be provocative, nor did we expect that some readers would not look beyond the cover. Apparently we overestimated the maxim, "You can't judge a book by its cover," since a few readers seem to have done just that.

Both of us enjoy art—as students, teachers, and artists. We have long been familiar with and respectful of the artistic career of Trevor Southey, whose works evoke and inspire thoughtful meditation on the dilemmas of the human spiritual condition through use of powerful symbolism dependent on tender, soulful portrayals of unadorned bodies. Southey's nude and partially nude depictions, reminiscent of the work of Renaissance artists such as De Vinci and Michelangelo, have for decades graced the galleries of the Harris Fine Arts Center at Brigham Young University and the LDS Church Museum, as well as other religious and secular institutions nationwide. We see his work as a modern reinterpretation and extension of a time-honored artistic tradition. We are perplexed and a little disappointed that some readers have apparently gleaned from Southey's art meanings never intended by the artist himself (as he explained in his introduction) or by us.

We saw in "Prodigal" the pain but eventual comfort of a son being reconciled to his father. Others saw a man praying beneath a hovering spirit. Some saw in the naked and anguished posture of the figures, the mix of agony and joy experienced by those who, stripped of encrusted layers of all types, come fi-

nally to deal with their essential selves. Other readers saw other things and thus made certain assumptions of our intent. We regret if the art gave offense to anyone. Still we are pleased that many readers found it moving and inspiring (to the extent that they have asked for the collector's edition poster of "Prodigal" advertised in this issue). Finally, we are grateful for the many words of encouragement and support for the issue, including the contents. If brisk sales and requests for new subscriptions are any indication, the spring issue was vital

and valuable for most readers.

We believe that works of art, including "Prodigal," are rarely self-interpreting. As "beauty is in the eye of the beholder," so is the meaning of art given to personal interpretation based on the background, attitudes, and predispositions of its viewers. We are reminded of President David O. McKay's response to one of his colleague's criticism of a bathing suit-clad "Day's of '47 Parade" beauty queen: "I don't see anything that is not beautiful. Do you?"

CALL FOR PAPERS

The 1993 Northwest Sunstone Symposium will be held
29-30 October in
Seattle, Washington.

Proposals for papers should be submitted by 1 August 1993
to Molly McLellan Bennion,
1150 22nd Avenue East, Seattle, WA 98112
or phone (206) 325-6868.