

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unhealthy Rhetoric

I enjoyed Allison Stimmler's reflections on missionary motivational rhetoric (Vol. 36, no. 3). Given the wealth of research showing that men are more overtly aggressive than women, Stimmler is probably right to suggest that rhetoric based on tropes of competition, sports, and war appeals to elders more than sisters.

However, I would caution against concluding that because such rhetoric appeals to male missionaries, it is therefore "right" for them—that such rhetoric meets their particularly male needs. It is not inevitable that, because most LDS missionaries are male, missionary culture will be driven by a business-like concern for numbers, nor is it inevitable that missionary rhetoric be dominated by athletic and military metaphors. The Church could foster a missionary culture that is pastoral rather than numbers-driven, that values quiet dignity over locker-room exuberance, and that encourages missionaries to think of themselves as sowers, shepherds, or teachers rather than warriors. One can, in fact, find statements that indicate Church leaders *want* missionaries to exemplify quiet dignity and pastoral concern. This is not so much a question of gender as it is one of different models of religiosity.

The motivational strategies used in the sisters' conferences that Stimmler describes (talking frankly about depression and the frustrations of the work, being assured that it's all right to feel negative emotions) could benefit many missionaries, regardless of gender. There are two reasons I suspect such strategies are not widely used—and here gender does come into play, but more indirectly.

First, in order to talk about their feelings in the way the sisters did at their special conferences, elders would have to open up in a way that is atypical for men in our society. Men aren't supposed to admit that they feel vulnerable or weak (though I'm inclined to think it would be healthy for them to do so). Instead, elders, along with sisters, get pep talks from the mission president and stand together to belt out "We Are All Enlisted." The point of these performances is to help missionaries overcome feelings of inadequacy but in a way that doesn't require them to articulate those feelings, since that's not "what men do."

Second, I suspect that mission leaders craft their motivational rhetoric on the assumption that most missionaries spend most of their time in a state of moderate motivation and therefore need to be "worked up." Hence the pep talks: the lofty goals, the incredible stories about other missionaries' successes, the extravagant promises of the blessings that follow sacrifice, the constant insistence on doing better. This rhetoric is delivered on the assumption that, after the high of zone conference wears off, most missionaries will settle back into a less demanding routine and will therefore need to be worked up again next month. I further suspect that, for most missionaries, this rhetoric works exactly as it's intended to. The problem is that for missionaries who start with a high motivation, this rhetoric can produce debilitating feelings of guilt or inadequacy.

Perfectionists of any gender face this problem. But sisters, as a group, may seem more vulnerable because

they, unlike the elders, aren't expected to serve and therefore may come to missionary service with higher levels of motivation than most elders.

My point is that it would be a mistake to think elders need martial pep talks while sisters need to discuss their feelings of inadequacy. The dominant rhetorical strategies for motivating missionaries are problematic for highly motivated individuals, regardless of gender. And this rhetoric is implicated in corporate and militant styles of religiosity that are arguably unhealthy for everyone.

John-Charles Duffy
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Response to Tobler

Douglas Tobler's letter to the editor ("Writing Something That Matters," Spring 2003) demonstrates, I believe, that the adjustment back to "civilian life" after a mission is a difficult one. When I was serving in the presidency of the Baltic States Mission, I remember feeling that the experience of trying to make the gospel work in the former Soviet Union reduced my spiritual life to its essence. When my wife, Ruth, and I first went to Lithuania, we were the only members of the Church in the entire country. In those first months, not only did we face the challenges of finding enough food and keeping our apartment warm (and praying for hot water), but we found our spiritual lives reduced to the fundamentals. I remember writing to a friend that, in trying to plant the seeds of the restored gospel in a land that had lain barren for nearly a hundred years (the restored gospel had first been introduced to western Lithuania at the turn of the last century), we didn't have the luxury of worrying about some of the problems that had occupied us at home. In the face of

finding places to meet, supervising translation of Church materials, facing hostile media, working with young missionaries, etc., intellectual complexities, doctrinal nuances, or questions about ecclesiastical practice just didn't seem that important.

Perhaps some of this explains the substance and tone of Professor Tobler's letter; and yet it is surprising, that having lived in a country (Poland) in which the suppression of personal expression, the manipulation of history, and the repression of intellectual inquiry not only retarded Polish culture but, I would guess, also made it more difficult to spread the gospel message there he could be so starkly anti-intellectual. In fact, I would characterize his sentiments as not simply anti-intellectual but angrily so. How else explain such expressions as "self-styled intellectuals," "worldly intellectuals," "know-it-all intellectuals," "intellectual drive," "intellectual fads," "arrogant intellectual pride," and "intellectual . . . immaturity"?

Tobler's characterization of naturalist intellectuals is not softened by any qualifiers: "All lack the absolute prerequisites for saying something true, wise, or significant: faith in God and Jesus Christ, a living testimony of the gospel and the Restoration, real experience in responsible Church callings, and the living companionship of the Holy Ghost" (emphasis mine). According to Tobler, intellectuals lack "any form of meekness and humility" (emphasis mine). This kind of anti-intellectualism is dangerous, for it stereotypes intellectuals as enemies of the Church at a time when anti-intellectualism is on the rise.

Tobler goes beyond attacking the scholarship and thinking of intellectu-

als who represent “a purely naturalistic viewpoint” to attacking their spirituality. He sees them as “faithless,” as seeking “the applause and honor of other worldly intellectuals and secular fame,” as “worldly,” as “spiritual pygm[ies],” and as lacking “any kind of spiritual qualification” (emphasis mine). He seems to argue that intellectuals have no role in the Church: “The world of faith is a world they know nothing about”; they are “without the Holy Ghost and a living testimony”; and “most do not believe . . . that the Lord plays a role in human history generally and especially in the direction of his church.”

While I do not personally know all of the scholars Tobler lists, I do know several quite well and feel that his characterization of them is unfair and inaccurate, not to say uncharitable. How does Tobler know whether these people have the Holy Ghost or whether they “believe . . . that the Lord plays a role in human history”? Over the past thirty years, the Church has had no better friend than Jan Shippo. Besides being an excellent historian and commentator on Mormon culture, Jan is a believing Christian. She has made an invaluable contribution to Mormon history, especially in helping outsiders see some of our more positive characteristics. The same could be said for Michael Quinn. Although he has been excommunicated (unjustly, many of us believe), Michael has retained his testimony of the gospel and his belief in the historicity of the Book of Mormon. (See Quinn’s “Apologia Pro Mea Via” in the December 2003 *Sunstone*.) In addition, he has written some of the most important studies on Mormon history in the past several decades. While I may not always agree with his conclusions, I have had no reason to question his integrity as a historian or as a believer.

One wonders how Tobler arrived at such a portrait of intellectuals, many of whom are committed Latter-day Saints with profiles of faithfulness that match or even exceed those of the general Church population. This isn’t to say that, in the Mormon intellectual community, there are not those who may have some of the characteristics Tobler lists, but it is to argue that most do not. Some of those who publish in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* might be characterized as antagonistic to the Church and some might clearly be said to have anti-Mormon biases, but most with whom I am acquainted are honorable and honest and appear to be attempting to understand Mormon history and culture with the best tools they have, including spiritual tools.

Anyone who has read very much Mormon history over the past three or four decades knows that some of our worst history has been written by faithful members (those Tobler characterizes as having the Holy Ghost) and some of the best by those Tobler denigrates as faithless. Apostates, excommunicants, and nonmembers as well as faithful members are capable of writing good or bad history. Some of the most significant insights into the Mormon experience in modern times have come both from those who write “faithful history” as well as those who write from a more skeptical, naturalistic scholarly position. Both are limited and yet both can enlighten us. We should be open to what each can teach us.

On a recent trip to Washington, D.C., I saw Brecht’s *Galileo* (David Hare’s translation). Galileo is a good example of the problem we sometimes have with determining truth. The Catholic Church insisted on its

version of the solar system (relying on what it considered the supremacy of the Bible and the declarations of the pope) in the face of scientific evidence to the contrary. At one point in the play, Galileo says, "Truth is the daughter of time, not the prisoner of authority." Sometimes Mormon history has been the prisoner of authority.

I don't wish to be unfair or uncharitable to Professor Tobler. I appreciate the fact that he has given a lifetime of faithful service to the Church. I know he enjoys a reputation among his former students and colleagues at BYU as an outstanding teacher and scholar. And there is some truth in the points he makes; sometimes intellectuals are proud, arrogant, and perhaps even "faithless." Some seem to be contentious, hostile, and unfair to the Church. Worse, some seem to lack charity for General Authorities, faithful Saints, or the writers of "faithful history." But to draw such an extreme and distorted picture of intellectuals is also unfair, hostile, and uncharitable.

As a long-time supporter of and participant in Mormon intellectual circles (serving both as editor of *Dialogue* and as chair of the Sunstone Board of Trustees), I know that there are risks to having open dialogue about our past. I share Professor Tobler's disdain for those who are motivated by pride or anger, for those whose scholarly work is destructive rather than constructive, and especially for those who lack basic civility in their discourse. Unfortunately, however, I have found such characteristics among apologist as well as naturalist writers and critics.

In his letter to the saints at Corinth, Paul gives sound advice to all of us—intellectual and nonintellectual alike: "Therefore, judge nothing be-

fore the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5).

Robert A. Rees
Brookdale, California

A Final Thank You

I learned with sorrow that a devoted *Dialogue* volunteer, author, and subscriber, Marc Schindler passed away a few months ago. Marc emailed me several years ago, explaining in a sincerely gentle and matter-of-fact way, that I was handling our email mass mailing incorrectly and compromising the privacy of our subscribers. I asked him if he would be willing to take on the tedious task so that I could be sure it was being done right. He readily agreed and told me that due to a medical condition, he was no longer employed and didn't know how long he'd be around; but to help him keep his mind active, he would gladly take on the job of maintaining our ever-changing email list and sending out the notices. He warned that he might not always be available if he wasn't feeling well and offered a back-up system. I was touched that he shared this part of his life and elated that this would be a mutually beneficial arrangement.

Each time I asked him to do another project, he was always concerned that he couldn't finish what he started, but the back-up system was never necessary. He was always there, always said yes, always completed his projects on time. He was, of course, greatly overqualified for this important, tedious, and laborious task. I was so grateful for his selfless willingness to repeatedly take on such an unglamorous task and for teaching me things

that ultimately made my job easier and more efficient.

Marc's contribution to *Dialogue* in his condition speaks volumes about the character of the caring, sensitive, and generous man he obviously was. My heart goes out to his family and friends. Though I never met him, he touched my life, and I will be forever thankful for knowing him and for his help. I know I said this to him when he was here; but if there is a place that he can hear me now, "Many, many thanks again, Marc, for all the work you did. I miss you."

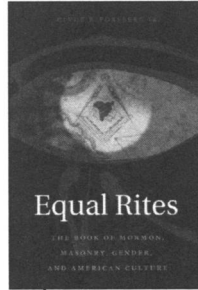
Lori Levinson
Dialogue Business Manager

Correction

The former editors regret that the last line of Newell G. Bringhurst's article, "A Biographer's Burden: Evaluating Robert Remini's *Joseph Smith* and Will Bagley's *Brigham Young*," *Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 97-107, was cut off in production. The final sentence should have read: "Indeed, as with Joseph Smith, the truly definitive biography of Brigham Young remains to be written."

Neal Chandler
Editor Emeritus

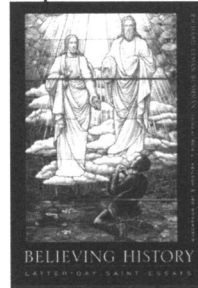
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