ROGER D. LAUNIUS and LINDA THATCHER, eds. *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994. xi; 402 pp. Notes, contributors, index. $32.50.

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Differing Visions is a collection of biographical and analytical essays about dissenters from various branches of Mormonism and about the phenomenon of dissent in Latter-day Saint religious history. The core of the book consists of seventeen biographical chapters by different authors succinctly describing the experiences of seventeen dissenters from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), as well as a leading contemporary dissenter from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). The foreword by Leonard Arrington and the introduction by Roger Launius and Linda Thatcher paint with broader brushes—analyzing Mormon dissent as a general social phenomenon occurring in a particular religious context.

Technically, the book is well done. The biographical chapters are basically arranged in chronological order and, for the most part, are capably written and edited. The chapters are adequately researched—some are very well researched. An effort to be balanced and fair to the individual subjects is evident, though some chapters seem more sympathetic to the subjects than scholarly. Generally, however, the tone is respectful and professional.

Summary of Contents

Ronald Romig begins with the tale of David Whitmer. What stands out in this account is Whitmer's apparent resentment of what he perceived to be the Prophet Joseph Smith's ambition when the grand scope of the Restoration began to be realized. As the restored Church grew much larger than many first imagined, Whitmer apparently feared losing control of, or his prominent position in, a good, small thing.

The focus of Kenneth Winn's chapter is summarized in the title: "'Such Republicanism as This': John Corrill's Rejection of Prophetic Rule." Elected a Missouri legislator by the Saints, Corrill apparently

cherished the checks and balances of the political government and thought that the Church's government needed such a system. He resented the alleged abuse of Mormon dissenters by zealots such as the Danites and so opposed the communal principles of the law of consecration that he became a bitter Missouri opponent of the Prophet and wrote a vindictive "history" of the Church.

Richard Howard chronicles the poignant odyssey of William McLellin in one of the better chronological partial histories in the volume. A talented if erratic leader, McLellin moved through a variety of alternative Mormon groups until "he had become a crank" (97) and died alienated from all with whom he had tried to associate.[1]

Richard Saunders's chapter on Francis Gladden Bishop describes how a charismatic evangelical convert's "allegiance to the Restored Gospel was crowded aside by the importance of his personal experiences with divinity" (104). What resulted was a surprisingly large "number of failed followings Bishop began" (111) before he immigrated to Utah and to the main body of the LDS Church just months before his death.

In "James Colin Brewster: The Boy Prophet Who Challenged Mormon Authority," Dan Vogel outlines the fascinating religious career of "perhaps the most prolific" of the "would-be prophets to leave the Mormon fold during Joseph Smith, Jr.'s, lifetime" (120). Brewster was only ten when he reported receiving revelations in 1836. At age eleven, he proposed to the Kirtland High Council "a plan for the better organization of the Church in temporal affairs," which he said an angel had delivered to him (121). At least five years later, after publishing a number of the books of Esdras (an ancient Israelite prophet whose writings Brewster claimed to receive in vision), Brewster was excommunicated. For the next eighteen years, Brewster preached and published his millennialistic revelations, led followers from Missouri to New Mexico, and possibly reached California before he became lost to history. Vogel attributes Brewster's "initial success" to Joseph "Smith's ultimate failure to satisfy the yearnings of some of the early Mormon converts for adequate millenarian leadership" (134).

William B. Smith, the Prophet's brother, is described by Paul Edwards as a man who was "always vocal, sometimes belligerent," frequently in "confrontation against existing authority" (140) and

who saw himself as part of a "Smith family . . . royalty" (141). As an Apostle and "Patriarch to the whole church" (144), William's refusal to subordinate his roles to the leadership of the Quorum of Twelve threatened Church unity and led to his excommunication. His career as a church leader thereafter foundered in several other branches of Mormonism.

Alpheus Cutler participated in laying the foundation for the Far West Temple and served on the Nauvoo High Council. Danny Jorgensen identifies Cutler's distraction as an apparent emphasis on a mystical "Lamanism" and his refusal to gather to Salt Lake with the main body of Latter-day Saints (164–65). Jorgensen briefly recounts the futile efforts of Brigham Young to keep Cutler and his followers in the Church.

One of the most analytical essays is Guy Bishop's chapter on Stephen Post, which traces the spiritualism, millennialism, and opposition to polygamy that attracted Post to Rigdonism. After the death of Joseph Smith, Post investigated a number of new orders of Mormonism and became convinced that Sidney Rigdon was the "true shepherd" (187). Post succeeded Rigdon in 1876 as the leader of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion, a group that fell apart upon Post's death.

Richard Holzapfel's well-written chapter, "The Flight of the Doves from Utah Mormonism to California Morrisitism: The Saga of James and George Dove," describes a group of English converts caught up in the Mormon Reformation of the 1850s who followed Joseph Morris, another British convert, in establishing a significant schismatic organization in South Weber, Utah. During a violent confrontation with lawmen resulting from the Morrisites' forcible detention of dissenters from their own group, Joseph Morris was killed. The Morrisites scattered throughout the West, and eventually the Doves succeeded Morris as leaders of the movement, organizing the Church of the Firstborn in San Francisco in 1865. They preached throughout the western states, frequently in Utah, but by 1910 their church disintegrated.

Another Utah schismatic movement is traced in John McCormick and J. R. Sillito's essay on Henry W. Lawrence. An orthodox Utah Mormon, Church leader, successful businessman, respected politician, and polygamist, Lawrence joined the dissenting "Godbeites" in

1869. Rankled by Brigham Young's vision of a united Zion, the temporal activities of the Church, and what he saw as a "lack of freedom of expression" (223), Lawrence spent thirty years in anti-Mormon politics. This very interesting chapter presents Lawrence as an idealist committed to a particular brand of late-nineteenth-century philosophy (libertarian egalitarianism) that led him out of the LDS Church and into a succession of political associations, including the Liberal party, the Populist party, and the Socialist party. How a successful entrepreneur of that era who rejected communitarian cooperative principles could advocate such proletarian politics is a curiosity that deserves further exploration.

Kenneth Godfrey suggests that the key to Frank J. Cannon's dissent was psycho-familial. For this son of George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency, "seeking parental approval became almost an obsession. . . . He was a highly emotional, often insecure man who seemed to never have believed that he could live up to his father's expectations" and who "seemed always in the shadow of his apostle brother Abraham H. Cannon" (243). Although he could apply his talents very effectively to building and defending the Church—for instance, he allegedly ghostwrote *The History of Joseph Smith the Prophet* for his father, and he successfully assisted in lobbying for Utah statehood—his weaknesses for alcohol, sexual immorality, and positions of honor plagued him throughout his life. He was one of Utah's first two senators, but after he was denied reelection, Cannon turned his intense anger against the Church and its leaders. He eventually moved to Denver and wrote numerous anti-Mormon books and articles until his death in 1933.

Martha Sonntag Bradley examines the life of Joseph W. Musser, a second-generation Mormon polygamist who came of age when the LDS Church was in the process of abandoning plural marriage. Musser claimed that, several years after the Manifesto, Lorenzo Snow selected him to take more wives and "help keep the law of Celestial marriage alive among the Saints" (265) and that "in 1915 an unnamed apostle conferred upon him the 'sealing power of Elijah, with instructions to see that plural marriage shall not die out'" (266). Musser became a leader in the fundamentalist movement and appointed his physician and fellow fundamentalist, Rulon Allred, to succeed him, which caused his followers to split into two rival factions.

Newell Bringhurst describes Fawn McKay Brodie as an intellectual who felt liberated from the constraints of faith and culture that defined the Mormon society in which she grew up. When she went to the University of Chicago, "'the confining aspects of the Mormon religion dropped off within a few weeks. . . . The sense of liberation I had at the University . . . was enormously exhilarating. I felt very quickly that I could never go back to the old life, and I never did.'"(283). However, the Church apparently was indispensable to Brodie's identity; for the rest of her career, she constantly defined herself against or in contrast to Mormonism and thrived on criticizing Church programs, leaders, and theology.

Jessie Embry contributes an exacting short study of Maurine Whipple, whose career resembles Brodie's in many ways. Both were members of what has been called "Mormondom's lost generation" of intellectual and literary figures. In their fledgling years of higher education, both Brodie and Whipple experienced, or at least expressed, the exhilarating sensation of self-perceived intellectual superiority. When Whipple left St. George to attend the University of Utah, she (like Brodie) was dazzled by the glamour of a non-Mormon lifestyle: "They seemed to have 'more money, and all pledged the best sororities.' The boys also had better manners" (303–4). Indeed, Whipple recalled that "'the high point of my college career [was] the night of my gentile date'" (304). Whipple was a talented writer whose book about Mormon polygamy, *The Giant Joshua,* won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Prize in 1938, although the book was unpopular in Utah because it focused on some negative aspects of polygamist family life. Whipple forever complained about slights, perceived injuries, lack of appreciation, and financial stress. In fact, her Church-related comments seem not so much those of a dissenter-on-principle but of a chronic complainer, perfectionist, and pessimist. Yet Whipple, like Brodie, could not sever her ties to the LDS community of faith. Unlike Brodie, however, Whipple reportedly was never even disfellowshipped, and she acknowledged that "we come back because Zion is worth occasional discomfort. We come back because Zion is the most unpredictable, exciting, satisfying place in the world to live" (315).

Readers who might be unfamiliar with trends in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints will be interested

in William Russell's enlightening chapter on "Richard Price: Leading Publicist of the Reorganized Church's Schismatics." Price is described as the most effective leader of a group of fundamentalist dissidents who believe that since 1958, RLDS leadership has been compromising its beliefs in exchange for liberal Protestant theology and yearning for Protestant acceptance. The Reorganized Church moved very cautiously against the dissidents, but eventually Richard Price was formally expelled. He "continues to enunciate his beliefs and to serve as the chief spokesperson for the fundamentalist cause" (337).

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, prolific anti-Mormon publishers, were both raised in LDS families, and both converted to Protestantism. Laurence Foster describes the Tanners as "career apostates" (355) rather than dissenters, and the label makes sense. He candidly notes some of the inconsistency of principle in the Tanners' work: "They always assume the worst possible motives in assessing the actions of Mormon leaders" (350), they take an "ends-justifies-means approach" (351) to criticizing LDS Church leaders and actions, and they violate the same principles they criticize Mormon leaders for having violated. Furthermore, "the techniques by which their materials have been acquired appear to leave much to be desired, ethically speaking" (352). Nevertheless, Foster summarily asserts that through their one-sided attacks on Mormonism, the Tanners have "sometimes played a positive role" in challenging Mormons to study their history and live up to their ideals (358).

The final chapter by Alice Allred Pottmyer is about Sonia Johnson, the ERA battle, and Johnson's eventual excommunication. This rendering of the Johnson story gives the reader very little new information. Perhaps because the incidents are so recent, the heavy slant of this journalistic chapter is very apparent.

Analysis

The foreword and introduction of *Differing Visions* present an analysis of dissent in Mormon history. In his brief foreword, Leonard Arrington observes that dissent has been a "neglected phase of the [Mormon] church's history" (ix), and he commends the recovery of "little-known information about the lives of the

people profiled" (x). He identifies several common themes reflected in the historical biographies, including the rich variety of potential interpretations of the work of Joseph Smith, the motivation of conscience rather than self-service that generally characterized the dissent of the individuals studied, and the inability of the dissenters to "ever fully reject the [Latter-day Saint] movement once having been associated with it" (xi). Arrington's short overview would have nicely introduced the seventeen biographical chapters of the book. However, it is separated from the historical text by the editors' long introduction.

Roger Launius and Linda Thatcher's introduction, "Mormonism and the Dynamics of Dissent," attempts to connect Mormon dissenters to the great dissenters of Christian history. Thus, the story of Anne Hutchinson's early-American religious dissent is compared with the phenomenon of Mormon dissent. The editors' desire to "offer an honest assessment . . . about the dissenting tendency in Mormonism" (15) is identified as the goal of the book. Joseph Smith, they claim, started his career as a religious dissenter, "bound to torment society," and they suggest that "the irony of the tormentor becoming the tormented, within Mormonism, is too rich to be ignored" (4)—one of several debatable, but undeveloped, observations in this chapter.

The editors note that more than a hundred known "schismatic movements have emerged from [Mormonism] since 1830" (6), and they sympathize with the "honest searchers for truth" who "found themselves" outside the acceptable bounds of the Church (7)—though the biographical chapters repeatedly describe deliberate decisions and intentional choices, not the mere happenstance of people who woke up one morning and "found themselves" outside the fold. The editors assert that fear of "authoritarianism" and "concern over what they thought was the development of a tyranny in the church" have been alienating concerns of many dissenters (8–9), and they see most Mormon dissenters as highly principled individuals. On the other hand, they claim the Mormon community has a low tolerance of dissent and a penchant for character assassination of those who do not conform. The introduction suggests that dissent is inherently neutral and that it has made positive contributions to Mormonism.

The identification of modern Mormonism with Brigham Young's interpretation of Joseph Smith's work, rather than that of William Smith or any other nineteenth-century dissenter, is compared to the identification of modern Christianity with Paul's interpretation of Jesus' teachings rather than the Gnostics'. "Either side could have won," and it was only "over the years" that the currently orthodox position prevailed (16). While much of this book is thoughtfully written, I was mildly disappointed with the introduction. It seemed to me to evade hard questions too often and to settle for giving standard, simplistic apologies for dissent.

Although the introduction contains some broad reflections that deserve full (and fuller) consideration, I thought it read much better the second time—after I had read the main biographical chapters. It should serve as a concluding chapter rather than an introduction. Moreover, it sets a tone that is somewhat disjunctive from, rather than conjunctive with, what follows: It is general and analytical while the chapters that follow are specific and descriptive. It emphasizes psychological nonfault assessment, while some of the chapters lay bare some personal flaws and tragic decisions obviously not unrelated to the paths of dissent.

The biographical chapters suggest that a focal issue for many dissenters was *power.* Some apparently had felt (or witnessed) the sting of abuse of power in their lives, and their fears about the potential for abuse of power led them to fight against "the kingdom of God com[ing] with power" (Mark 9:1). In many cases, the dissenters had other grievances. Often there were personality conflicts with Church leaders, or there had been some mistake committed by a person holding Church office, or the dissenter was aware of some hardship caused by Church policies or programs. There was legitimate cause for some dissatisfaction and frustration. Such is life among mortal human beings. Forgiveness and patience would seem to have been the appropriate remedies in most cases. But the wounds festered, the injuries were harbored, immediate justice was expected, and things that matter most were sacrificed for things that, in the long run, matter least.

It is a very serious thing to our Father in Heaven to "offend one of these little ones which believe in me" and cause them to leave the kingdom wherein salvation is to be found (Matthew 18:6).

The diligent efforts of Brigham Young and others to keep William Smith and Alpheus Cutler in the Church are examples of the kind of extra effort that can be made to reach out and bring back the dissenters, to strengthen, support, and bear with them.

Curiously, polygamy did not figure as a more significant cause of dissent. Polygamy appears to have been a focal point for many dissenters' grievances—a rallying point upon which many could find common ground to criticize or persecute the Church or justify leaving (and persuade others to leave). Seldom, however, does the practice of polygamy appear to have been the motivating cause for dissenters to leave the Church; it seems to have been an excuse or last-straw occasion for leaving, rather than the underlying reason for doing so.

Regrettably, some chapters are marred by literary "drive-by shootings," taking gratuitous passing shots at Joseph Smith, other LDS prophets, LDS Church policies, and Church structure. These detracted from the scholarly quality of the book, but overall the historical chapters achieve a fair level of balance.

The editors and several of the authors make an effort to show that dissenters have "built" the kingdom and contributed to the improvement of Zion. But there are two problems with those generic claims. First, specific examples are not usually identified or documented. Second, even where it is demonstrated that dissenters advocated a change that was later adopted as Church policy, proof of causation is lacking. Mere association is not necessarily causation. It could be argued at least as plausibly that criticism of a Church policy by impatient critics actually impedes the improvement of Zion. Untimely reform can confuse, offend, or alienate many precious sons and daughters of God; unduly enhance the stature of some misguided, self-vaunting agitator; or mislead members about the process by which revelation comes (comparing it to pressure politics) or the persons through whom it comes. Certainly, if a high degree of unity in the Church is necessary before sensitive kingdom-building revelation can be received, criticism and dissent can hardly be said to "contribute" positively to the revelation and establishment of Zion.

Some of the harder questions about dissent that might be asked are: How does a group of disciples become "of one heart and one

mind" (Moses 7:18, A of F 10)? In a world that prizes individual liberty, especially the radical individualism of America at the end of the twentieth century, how can any group of people realistically aspire to "come in the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13), to "be one" (John 17:11, 21), that they may be "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32), "perfectly joined together" (1 Cor. 1:10), of "one spirit, with one mind striving together" and "of one accord" (Philip. 1:27, 2:2)? What is the relationship of dissent to apostasy? How do those two concepts/activities differ? When the Savior and his Apostles foretold latter-day apostasy (Matt. 24:4–5, 10–13, 23–24; 2 Thes. 2:1–11; 2 Tim. 3:1–5; 2 Pet. 2:1–22; Rev. 13:6–7), did they refer to some activities of dissenters? What do the scriptures say and suggest about dissent? How should apprentice disciples of the Lord respond to dissenters in the Church? How are Mosiah 26 and Doctrine and Covenants 42 relevant to contemporary LDS dissent?

From the parable of the sower (Luke 8:5–15), we know there will be people who fall away—there always have been and will be dying leaves on the green branch. The parable teaches that there is a real adversary who "taketh away the word" from some, that others "have no root . . . and in time of temptation fall away," and others "are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life." There are a multitude of ways in which spiritual seeds can wither in an individual's life—as the seventeen biographical chapters of *Differing Visions* illustrate.

Perhaps the main obstacle to united discipleship and the main cause of dissent are contained in one word—*submission.* King Benjamin said that the follower of Christ must become "as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19). In our day, teaching the importance of submission may seem utterly foolish to a generation that celebrates empowerment; self-made, independent adults are not attracted to the counsel to become like a little child, and a fatherless generation (separated socially if not physically from their fathers) weaned on antipatriarchal ideology may not relate to the counsel to submit "as a child doth submit to his father." The part of King Benjamin's testimony that causes me to tremble most is "willing to submit to all things which the Lord

seeth fit to inflict upon him." The word "inflict" suggests suffering and pain. King Benjamin seems to be saying that suffering and enduring real pain are unavoidable as we struggle to submit to all that the Lord will inflict upon his disciples. Many will balk and some will turn away when that painful process of refinement begins. Is not the trial of submission the main wellspring of dissent?

So the question remains: how is a growing, dynamic, worldwide Church to develop the unity necessary to be worthy of revelation from, the advent of, and personal association with Jesus Christ, the Creator, Savior, and Redeemer of the world? What is the role of dissent in that unity-creating process? Is dissent a cleansing process? Is it a self-selecting-departure-to-make-the-remainder-more-united process? Or is dissent a "cry for help" from those who need an extra measure of patience, tolerance, love, and encouragement, without whose return to the fold the flock will not be "one," worthy of the acceptance of the Shepherd, who has atoned for us all? I hope that the study and discussion begun in *Different Visions* will continue until these troubling questions have been fully and appropriately considered.

NOTE

[1]For a more complete biography of William E. McLellin, see Larry C. Porter, "The Odyssey of William Earl McLellin: Man of Diversity, 1806–83," in *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836,* ed. Jan Shipps and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 291.