

MEMORANDUM - THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
PROVO, UTAH
84601



ERNEST L. WILKINSON, PRESIDENT

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

October 4, 1966

Sterling McMurrin
Provost
University of Utah
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Professor McMurrin:

The most recent issue of Dialogue contains a rather long letter that I wrote concerning your reply to the reviews of your Theological Foundations. I have noticed that the editors deleted two paragraphs from my letter. One of the deletions consisted of my introductory remarks which made my remarks appear somewhat more positive.

I am enclosing a copy of the two deleted paragraphs.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Louis Midgley".

Louis Midgley
Associate Professor

LM/gs

Enclosure

May 10 1971

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

For those who are concerned to relate Mormonism to features of the larger culture, both in order to understand better the Gospel and to appreciate more fully its relevance to the world, the publication of Sterling McHarrin's Theological Foundations is of great special significance. But his recent comments will only heighten our suspicion and hostility if many Mormons already feel towards him and will surely reduce the impact of his book. It will now be even more difficult for those of us who are convinced that the book should receive thoughtful, critical attention to recommend it to Mormons. His reply to the three reviews seem to indicate a certain unwillingness to entertain constructive criticism. The reviewers were not hostile to him personally and were actually quite lavish in praise of the book. Of course, they did make some pointed criticisms. The issues raised by the reviewers certainly merit further consideration. A really careful response to these criticisms would have been gratifying. Instead, he seems to have used the occasion to settle accounts with the Mormon people, the church leaders, and those at Brigham Young University such as Hugh Hibley who are genuinely interested in Mormon theology. The most surprising thing was the blue ribbon he awarded to himself for the effort but he thinks he won with Truman Ladsen.

SECOND PARAGRAPH

I genuinely hope he will reconsider his position on the Mormon doctrine of salvation. Though he repeatedly insists that his only purpose is comparison and description, he is nevertheless heavily involved in prescribing for Mormon Theology. However, he does not stand on the same footing. "The primary task of theology," he says, "is the reconciliation of the revelation to the culture, to make what is taken on faith as the word of God meaningful in the light of accepted science and philosophy." But one who really believes that God has spoken will not be interested in merely reaching some kind of an accommodation between the revelation and the culture. McHarrin seems to believe that the

"accepted science and philosophy" should call the tune; theologians make the adjustments. On this issue I think that Hugh Hiebley is far closer to authentic Mormonism than Eldredge. But given Eldredge's program, I find it difficult to see that he has consistently carried it out. After all, his own "liberal ideal" which emphasizes man's rationality, essential goodness and perfectibility in the form of a version of the doctrine of progress, is not quite out of date; it is not at all consistent with the accepted science and philosophy of our day, for there is now a deep scepticism of such things. He may feel that it is not necessary to conform to the world on all matters, and I would agree with him on that. In any case, it is his liberal humanism that is not now "meaningful in the light of accepted science and philosophy," not the "studied irrationalism" of the Andersons, Hadsens and Hiebleys.

Professor Louis Midgley
Department of Political Science
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah

*Written but
not sent*

Dear Professor Midgley:

It was thoughtful of you to send me a copy of your letter to Dialogue commenting upon my reply to the reviewers of my essays on Mormon theology.

I must say that I am amazed at some of the things in your letter. In the first place you write as if you were of the opinion that I was hostile toward my reviewers. This certainly is not the case. I am at a loss to know where you would get such a notion. I hope that the reviewers don't feel the way you do about this matter. I think your statement at this point is totally irresponsible.

I am somewhat amused by your saying that I used the occasion to settle accounts with the Mormon people, the Church leaders, etc. I used the occasion to state my position in the matters relating to the subject of the book and of the reviews. Finally, the most surprising thing in your letter is your failure to recognize that my comment on the argument with Truman Madsen was simply intended to be a touch of humor. Referring to your second paragraph, I can only say that I am sorry that you seem so ready to abandon the Mormon ideal which emphasizes man's rationality, essential goodness, and perfectability. I long ago, myself, abandoned the doctrine of progress and I am very much aware of the fact that man is irrational as well as rational, evil as well as good. But those of you ~~who~~ who are so ready to read rationality, goodness, and perfectability out of Mormonism are simply involved in destroying the Mormonism which has been the foundation of the Church until the present time. Though I am not an orthodox Mormon and I do not share fully in the liberal ideal of Mormonism and certainly do not regard myself as a liberal Mormon, I nevertheless hope that you will tread

lightly on such important matters.

In your second paragraph, last sentence, you refer to the Andersons, Madsens and Nibleys. I am not acquainted with Anderson beyond the involvement with his review and some slight correspondence. I have never regarded Madsen as being an irrationalist. Nibley, it seems to me, is clearly an irrationalist and a very competent one. It surprises me, however, that you refer as you do to Hugh Nibley's interest in Mormon theology. I have no doubt that Hugh is interested in the ~~the~~ theology but ~~if~~ if he still entertains the views which he held a few years ago when he lectured on theology in Spencer Hall, he had ^{the} contempt for theology -- all theology, including Mormon theology. He made this very plain in his lecture on the occasion of my questioning him about his attitude toward Mormon theology.

I look forward to reading your letter in full. My interest is aroused by the two paragraphs that you have sent me. I am sorry that you didn't send the whole piece. You apparently have written a rather angry letter and seem to suppose that my reply to my reviewers was written in the same spirit. It is difficult for me to believe that they feel this way. As a matter of fact, after your letter is published and they have had an opportunity to read it, if the published parts convey the notion that I reacted in the manner which you describe, I certainly will write to them and assure them that I had nothing but appreciation for their reviews, something that I clearly indicated in my reply, and nothing but respect for their ideas, though at certain points I clearly disagreed with them. I am sorry that you feel that my response to their criticisms were not careful. In this, I think, you do me a very grave injustice. I read their criticisms many times and wrote what I regard as a careful and responsible reply. Apparently you feel that I should have simply agreed with them and been done with it. I hope that you

will read my review once more and see how thoroughly I expressed appreciation for the r reviews and how I agreed with them at many points. Frankly, the parts of your letter which I have read strike me as being very, very strange.

Again, let me thank you for your thoughtfulness in sending me the paragraphs and assure you that I appreciate your interest in the matter.

Very sincerely,

is that theology is the adjustment of revelation to any kind of science or philosophy. If you will take another look you will see, and your letter quotes it in this way, that I said "accepted science and philosophy". I mean by that, the science and philosophy that are accepted by the people who are the creators of the theology. I am at a loss to know why you would



