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Growing Up in the Church

by Irene Bates

To have "grown up in the church" is synonymous, I believe, with being "born in the Church," and in that sense I'm not qualified to address the subject. My husband and I were converted to the church in England 38 years ago. But at a women's retreat some time ago Shirley Paxman gave what I believe to be a more appropriate understanding of the term. She said, "We all have to grow up in this Church and stand on our own feet." I've thought a lot about that since. And recently I read a statement by the head of the UCLA gerontology research center who said, "At 74 one is not too old to grow up."¹ Well, I'm almost 72, still growing up, and the quality of my maturing has been affected deeply by my experience in the Church—helped by a lot of people to whom I am deeply indebted.

When I was a child, minor aches and pains were usually called "growing pains." So, along with the delights of discovery that I've enjoyed since joining the Church, I've had my share of growing pains. Some have led to deeper understanding, others remain troublesome. I'd like to share a little of my personal journey.

Since the central element in my conversion was a greater understanding of God, I'd like to begin by explaining how that new concept of God affected my personal growth and influenced my relationship with others. And then I'd like to explore a seeming paradox—how this deep foundation of my faith has met with challenge in recent years from the very institution that gave it life.

As a little girl in the Methodist Church, I loved Jesus. For me He epitomized everything I loved and trusted, even worshipped. I felt so sure of His love. But I didn't like God. So much of what I read of Him seemed the antithesis of what Jesus stood for. He was angry, vengeful, jealous, arbitrary, dictatorial, and so on. It was hard to admire Him. But most troubling for me, and what I really found hard to deal with, was the image of a Father who would send His Son to suffer and die as Jesus did. If God was so powerful, why didn't He find another way?

After we'd had several months of discussion with bright and insightful missionaries, they realized how much this problem troubled me. (I hadn't dared voice it to anyone before.) So Elders Peterson and Snarr spent hours researching a special lesson on the atonement and even presented us with a scriptural guide they'd prepared themselves. (In those days missionaries were freer to design their own lessons.) They then gave us a beautiful lesson on the atonement, one that altered my view of God forever. In one illuminating moment I discovered that God didn't *send* His Son—He *allowed* Jesus the freedom to give His own gift of grace and unconditional love for the salvation of His brothers and sisters. In so doing God gave Jesus the opportunity to reach the full measure of His love—the full stature of his being. And because of that, all of us were blessed.

I realized that that example of the greatest love and trust held the key to God's purpose for *us* in this life. It established a model just

as Jesus' baptism did. The Lord wanted *us* to discover our own capacities for love, to develop *our* spiritual gifts to the full so that we could become more effective bearers of eternal truths. To that end He gave us the very risky gift of free agency.

The full impact of that realization reached me only gradually through the years, even though it was there for me to see quite clearly in the lives of converts, as well as in my own life. Like infants discovering an exciting new world we explored not only the Gospel, we unearthed hitherto unknown strengths, capacities and gifts in ourselves. This, in turn, enabled us to share in loving service all we had discovered.

I remember Barbara Robinson, a victim of cerebral palsy, who began to write heart-wrenching poetry. Those poems released the wealth of impressions and insights that had been buried deep inside her for years, and they contributed to new understandings and appreciation in all of us. There was a Lancashire cotton-mill worker who became the greatest stake Relief Society president I have known. I remember an interfaith meeting that she envisioned, initiated, and organized in Manchester in 1964, as well as other equally innovative programs. In her sixties now, Maureen Hoyle has served two missions in South Africa, living in a township where she stayed with local families and almost froze to death at night in the primitive housing. Her letters tell of the love and admiration she felt for these people and how truly loving they were towards her. I could go on telling many such stories. So the Church in practice confirmed the idea that personal growth and the development of individual spiritual gifts accompanied the Gospel and enriched us all as we shared them. Indeed, in the good old days when we had real lessons in Relief Society, I taught a Social Science lesson in which a key concept was, "The Law of God and His organization is devoted *entirely* to helping man achieve his greatest potential."² (I didn't doubt at the time that "man" was a generic term. In the light of this new knowledge how could it have been anything else?)

And, as I looked at my own experience, after seven years in the Church, I realized then how much I had grown. From being a contented, rather shy housewife and mother of four, having led a relatively sheltered life with loving parents and a very protective husband, I'd been thrust into a more public role. First teaching in MIA, Primary, Relief Society, and then the Gospel Doctrine class, I suffered through many sleepless nights, but I was too intrigued to succumb to the fear. I was blessed by *having* to read, *having* to



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study—far more than was required by the manual because of demanding students—and by a whole realm of discovery. It was like having a lamp switched on in my mind. And I found it answering a soul-deep hunger in me.

I'd always been curious about everything, had been a good student, loved reading and was fairly well-informed. But this was different. Our twelve months with exceptional missionaries had provided a world of new ideas and challenges that required exposure and examination and debate. Argument itself was new to me. In MIA we organized debates on every subject under the sun, including theology. I found these discussions exhilarating and fulfilling because they lit up new understandings. Leaders like President McKay and Hugh B. Brown fed us spiritually. The writings of B. H. Roberts and John Widtsoe ignited our minds and spirits. The church manuals were simply the sparks that set us going, and we could have gone on for hours. Even when I was called to leadership positions—and those were the most painful challenges of all—I gained a new perspective and understanding of what leadership demands in personal terms. I still don't like those jobs: being a leader is not one of my spiritual gifts. But the value of understanding has become paramount in my life, and so I have ventured more.

We had been in the Church twelve years when we moved to Salt Lake. There we were welcomed warmly into the neighborhood. Church, however, was different in Zion. It was certainly very orderly. The conservative, well-to-do ward into which we moved was so efficiently run, and lessons were extremely well-prepared. Visual aids were amazing, especially in Relief Society. I can recall many of them without necessarily remembering what the lessons were about. It seemed that the Church was working perfectly. Yet slowly I became conscious of a subtle discomfort. Vaguely, I began to feel a kind of constraint towards conformity, or uniformity. No one had any questions, it seemed, and the spiritual spontaneity was gone.

Then Lynda, our daughter, enrolled me at the University of Utah where overnight I came to life again and was off on my journey of discovery. Another plus was that Bill was made a High Councilman in a University stake. Attending Church there we felt more at home with lively students who, away from their home wards, certainly had lots of questions.

When we moved to Los Angeles in 1971, I transferred to UCLA where in a seminar I encountered the writings of German sociologist Max Weber. Preparing a paper on a particular sociological theory of Weber's, I got sidetracked—as usual—fascinated by some of his other ideas. One of them was his theory about the transformation of

charismatic movements.

Weber defines charisma as "the creative, innovative, personal experience of divine grace." In other words, literally, a "gift of the spirit." Mormonism began as a charismatic movement through one man's experience of divine grace. While the church has made a remarkable transition to a worldwide institution, in doing so a significant paradox has been created—a paradox arising in part from the Church's routinization or inevitable reduction of charisma to a customary, unimaginative procedure.

I became aware of this paradox only gradually. From this awareness I gained some reassurance that what I had been experiencing on a *personal* level was obviously a reflection of the kind of evolution that the Church itself was going through as a developing institution. Rather than encouraging free-spirited, charismatic experience among its membership, it seemed now that the Church increasingly emphasized absolute obedience to authority as well as conformity to certain prescribed ways of thinking for the sake of institutional stability. I just let it rest there for a while. But I was to discover the stresses and strains accompanying this evolution on all levels of Church activity.

I tried to keep in mind what this journey is all about. It is about spiritual growth. It is the chance to learn, first hand, what real love is. It is the opportunity to know personally all the truths that are rooted in the greatest love this world has known. The love of God and the unconditional, voluntary sacrifice of Jesus Christ teaches us the importance of every soul. It is the quality of that love that demands of us a greater sensitivity to the value of each unique human being.

Sometimes this revelation brings the most painful consciousness of all in our spiritual growth, namely, the helplessness we feel before those who suffer. For example, several years ago during a fund-raising auction I purchased a trip to the interior of Mexico with a group of doctors who volunteered their time and expertise to fly to areas of the world where medical services were not readily available. Dr. Hinich, a member of our ward, belonged to the group. After a hair-raising flight in a small plane we landed in a field and were greeted as if the Savior Himself were descending from the skies. It was one of the most significant experiences of my life. But it was also one of the most humbling as I realized how little I had to offer those people. One moment stands out. I spoke a little Spanish and was busy entertaining some small children with my feeble, and to them hilarious, attempts to talk with them while their parents were awaiting treatment. One woman waiting had a little toddler hanging fearfully onto her skirts, and she was nursing a baby six months old. Several of the other little ones running around were hers, too. And as I saw

the soul-deep fatigue in her eyes—the defeatedness, sadness and resignation—quite suddenly I saw her as my sister in the deepest sense. And I bled inside. I don't think I said more than three or four words all the way home. That one moment in the mountains of Mexico told me more of what Jesus meant about sisterhood and brotherhood than any sermon ever could.

More recently in an article on last year's International Women's Day, I read about the work of women in the international human rights organizations who had "stripped off their organization's old blinders." Previously, violence or other abuse against women had been dismissed as a private, cultural, traditional or religious matter—something that was tiptoed around by talking of cultural relativism. The article included an horrendous list of such abuses. But those few women succeeded (to some extent) in raising the consciousness of the world, with the result that gender-related abuse was placed on the human rights agenda of tribunals called for by the United Nations.³

Amidst all the suffering in the world around us today, it may seem trivial to be concerned about institutional trends in the Church where, by comparison, we are treated well. But we have to look a little deeper than our immediate condition. *Because* beliefs and values are central to one's response to life, those seemingly trivial concerns may be the very obstacles that stand in the way of the kind of personal development that could enable us to make a difference in the world. So, today, when it seems that some Church leaders seek to inhibit our maturing by condemning such explorations as independent LDS symposia and limiting other opportunities for discovery and growth, such as study groups, I am saddened. While I understand that conformity allows a religion to achieve the control and stability it needs to survive and grow, I hurt when I hear of a betrayal of the promise of the Gospel in the lives of faithful individuals or when members are asked to sacrifice their integrity and their talents in the interests of conformity. And when I see leaders denying the very pattern of trust that the Lord has set with His Son, it causes me to wonder.

For this happens on all levels of the Church. I, too, have suffered the pain of being "silenced" (at least for the moment). Strangely it has happened when I have felt most spiritually in tune. And it is wounding to the spirit.

But then, paradoxically, I remind myself that it was through the Church that I was led to this life-giving, liberating idea of godly love and trust; it was the Church that provided the opportunities for discovery and growth; and it is the Church that has in its midst men and women who are courageous enough, and caring enough, to speak up for the truths that Jesus taught. Confronted with this paradox I find myself asking questions: Is it inevitable that a religious institution's major concern must become its own efficiency and control in order to survive and accomplish its stated goal? In the end, what does an institution gain if, for the sake of its larger goal, the integrity of those for whom it exists is sacrificed? Or are these institutional problems just further hurdles that the Gospel *itself* is presenting? Is this merely another stage in the challenge of growing up in the Church and accepting personal responsibility? After all, Boyd K. Packer did say that we had to learn to be spiritually independent.⁴ For some, perhaps, that may seem a daunting prospect.

I once read on a calendar, "One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time." That was my experience when I discarded the relatively safe and undemanding harbor of Methodism to become a member of a participatory Mormon Church. Now, I feel I am in a similar situation. My search for truth encouraged by the Gospel requires that at times I must lose sight of the safe shore of institutional acceptance and approval. I have the courage, I believe, but I must summon the will and the energy to grow in wisdom and knowledge, in understanding and humility, to be prepared to suffer censure or suspicion, and to forgive. That asks a great deal. But I

am beginning to sense that there is a deeper loyalty required of me to the very community that urged me on in the first place—not to "steady the ark," as critics may term it, but to be *responsible*, rather than (to quote Brigham Young) "trusting [my] eternal destiny in the hands of leaders with a reckless confidence that in itself would thwart the purposes of God..."⁵

Just recently I was made aware of two separate instances where Catholic nuns, in what they call "actions of conscience," have rebelled against certain institutional rules that are impediments to "truth, dignity and full human development." Wonderful, mature women, they left safe institutional havens to seek further training or new professions to better serve the suffering humanity they saw around them. They have been condemned by, or exiled from, the church they love, because of their disobedience, but their compassionate integrity has served to enrich their communities.

Lowell L. Bennion talked of integrity at one of the earliest BYU Women's Conferences, in 1979. This gentle, loving man moved many of us to tears, including those sitting on the stand with him. His message has continued to give me courage. Among other things, he said, "I don't care what happens. If you can feel your own integrity you can stand up to the whole world. And 'what does it profit a man [or a woman] if he [or she] gain the whole world and lose his [or her] own soul?'"⁶

I am still grateful for the Gospel and, despite some institutional attempts to deny its promise, I'm not giving up on it yet. When I think of the price paid by the Savior for that most awesome, risky gift of free agency, I dare not hand over my heritage. I am humbled by the greatness of God's love and trust. I now see God as a supremely loving Father who gave His Son the opportunity to give everything He was capable of giving. Because of that godly love, Jesus Christ now inspires us. We stand in awe before Christ's courage in taking on a powerful, traditional institution that He felt was misrepresenting His Father's work.

Free agency was dearly purchased, I believe, so that we, too, may become *vessels* of spiritual truth rather than simply *tools*. The shapes and abilities of inanimate tools are determined and limited by their functions and by those who use them. Vessels don't have to be a prescribed shape, size, or color, nor need they be limited; they can grow with us and with our developing gifts.⁷ As we grow, so our capacity grows, and we are able to share more and more of all that our Heavenly Parents knew we could give.

I am grateful to many kindred spirits who have encouraged my growing up at my own pace and in my own way. Betty Shabazz, in speaking of her father Malcolm X, said, "Each human being goes through an evolution of growth. We should not judge a person at the different stages, nor should we put obstacles to impede that growth—rather let them flower." This requires of us the recognition that we are all at different stages in our journey.

I believe that God's love is evidence of His trust in us. He wants us to grow in wisdom, to be responsible in our loving and to be humble in our sharing. I believe that this is what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is really all about. I hope with all my heart that our Heavenly Parents will sustain us in our efforts to preserve that beautiful vision.

NOTES

- 1 Dr. James Birren, in "At 74, He Says You're Not Too Old to Grow Up." *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 1993, p. J4.
- 2 *Relief Society Magazine*, 1964.
- 3 Ellen Goodman, "At Long Last, Women are Being Counted as Part of the Human Race." *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1993, p. B7.
- 4 Boyd K. Packer, "Let Them Govern Themselves." Address to Regional Representatives, March 30, 1990.
- 5 Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1944, p.135.
- 6 Lowell L. Bennion, "The Challenges of Change." BYU Women's Conference, February 10, 1979. From my notes written at the time.
- 7 I'm indebted to Professor Jeffrey Alexander, at UCLA, for causing me to consider the difference between being a "vessel" and a "tool."

MWF Quarterly *Theology Editor Margaret Merrill Toscano received the Woman of Courageous Action Award from the Utah Chapter of the National Organization for Women. The following is her acceptance speech given on October 1, 1993.*

The Courage to Act, to Speak, to Risk

Margaret Merrill Toscano

I want to begin by thanking the women of NOW for this honor and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you tonight, which for me is an award in itself. I must confess that I have always loved giving speeches. As a child I would volunteer to give talks in Sunday School as often as possible; I enjoyed thinking about a topic and presenting my ideas to a group. At that time my church leaders were pleased with my eagerness to speak; but, needless to say, they have grown less pleased over the years as my woman's voice began questioning the status quo and challenging the patriarchal hierarchy.

Ironically, I received the phone call from Robin Frodge informing me of the NOW award just the morning after a meeting with my LDS bishop in which he advised me to avoid all public speeches or media attention. This July meeting was part of an ongoing dialogue with my church leaders, which had begun a week and a half earlier when my stake president called me in to give me an ultimatum: I must stop writing and speaking or I would be considered an apostate. He said I could not expect to be a member in good standing when I had spoken out on issues which he said were embarrassing to the Church, on issues such as women's right to the priesthood and the importance of female deity.

I told him that I could not be silent, and not simply because I feel strongly that women will always be second-class citizens in the Church so long as they are denied priesthood and God is spoken of only in male terms. More important for me was the issue of silence itself. More fundamental was the question of freedom of conscience and speech. I could not and would not be silent because to do so would reinforce what I see as the major problem in the LDS Church today: an oppressive and legalistic authoritarianism which is not only contrary to the basic tenets of Mormonism but which also destroys the climate of freedom and grace that is necessary for individual growth and the flourishing of an open-minded and loving religious community.

There was a time in my life when I would have submitted or compromised in some way, with my words at least if not with my heart. But it was too late; it was twenty years too late. And not just for me,

but for others too, who by the middle of September had been given similar threats, in the form of summonses to appear in Church courts. We were all obedient once when we were young, but now we are middle-aged, middle-aged dissidents. We missed the countercultural revolution of the sixties and seventies: we were at BYU. And now here we are twenty years later with a revolution of our own. (Everything seems to come to Utah twenty years late.) Now some of us find ourselves committing acts of civil disobedience in the Mormon community: we can't follow rules we feel are invalid, or obey simply because we've been told, or agree to be silent when we see injustices.

You've been reading about it in the newspaper; you've seen it on TV. Lynne Whitesides was disfellowshipped on September 14 for apostasy: she talked about God the Mother and disagreed with Church leaders in public. Avraham Gileadi was excommunicated on September 15 for apostasy: his books interpreting Mormon scripture challenged the exclusive right of leaders to define doctrine. My husband Paul Toscano was excommunicated on September 19 for apostasy: he criticized the authoritarianism of church leaders, advocated feminist theology, and refused to follow the stake president's request not to speak at the Sunstone Symposium. Maxine Hanks was also excommunicated on September 19: her feminism was too radical for the Church, and she dared to speak it publicly. Lavina Fielding Anderson was excommunicated on September 23, also for apostasy: her crime was simply collecting stories—the stories of people, a majority of them women, who have been abused by the ecclesiastical system—and she refused to stop speaking out for the disenfranchised. Today we learned that Michael Quinn also has been excommunicated in his third church court, simply because he has written factual church history which he refuses to white-wash to please leaders.

I expected to join the group now referred to as the "September Six." When my stake president first gave me the ultimatum, I went through the agony of examining what my church membership means to me. I'm a sixth generation Mormon. My excommunication would be painful not only to me but even more so to my extended family. I love the Mormon religion and its people, even if I dislike its claims to exclusive truth and even though I have major disagreements with present church policies, especially those dealing with the status of women. I've stayed in the Church in spite of personal pain because I have deep spiritual and emotional ties to the religion and because I believe I have a right as a member to help define what that religion is and will be.

Mormonism is an American religion; its

theology is rooted in fundamental principles of freedom: freedom is seen as a constituent element of personhood and personhood is both primal and indefeasible in Mormon cosmology. If all thinking Mormons leave the Church, all of the expansive, liberating aspects of Mormon theology are likely to be lost, and the atmosphere in the Church will only become more oppressive. Someone needs to speak out for change. Someone needs to oppose this stultifying climate of fear. The members at large deserve something better.

These are the kinds of arguments I used to bolster myself. I remembered Joan of Arc's speech from Maxwell Anderson's play:

Every man gives his life for what he believes. Every woman gives her life for what she believes. Sometimes people believe in little or nothing, nevertheless they give up their lives to that little or nothing. One life is all we have, and we live it as we believe in living it, and then it's gone. But to surrender what you are, and live without belief—that's more terrible than dying—more terrible than dying young.

I accepted the inevitability of my collision course with church leaders, and it felt right to be sacrificing my membership for principles I believed in. Then something happened to change the direction of events: my bishop and my husband intervened to save me from a disciplinary council. My bishop took the responsibility for dealing with my so-called problem by setting up a process for ongoing negotiations, and my husband Paul diverted the stake president's attention to his own disagreements with church leaders and policies, which eventually led to his excommunication.

And then I had to deal with the mixture of emotions I felt about my escape from church disciplinary action. I had to look deep inside at my doubts and desires, at my ambivalence about what had happened. I had to face all of my inner demons—my fear and pride, my anger at men for having the power to decide whether I was in or out of the Church. And while I knew that my husband had acted from a place of concern and moral commitment and that my bishop wanted to reconcile differences, I still resented the fact that men were trying to define what my relationship to the Church would be; and I was depressed that I felt guilty about my resentment.

It is such a familiar pattern. Throughout history women have been defined by patriarchal standards. They are the Other, the one without the phallus, the gap, that which lacks or is invisible.

There is an old African tale about a man who was given a beautiful and magical wife on the condition that he not open her most prized possession, a little basket, without her

permission. His curiosity finally got the best of him one day and he secretly opened it, only to discover nothing inside. While he was laughing at what he thought was a woman's silly game, the magical wife disappeared, not because he had disobeyed but because he saw nothing in the basket. In fact, it was full of treasures from the sky to be used to enrich the earth.

What women have must first be valued by women themselves. They must assert the reality of their gifts against a tradition that makes them doubt their knowledge about their own lives. Gerda Lerner puts it this way:

...Since [women's experience] has usually been trivialized or ignored, it means overcoming the deep-seated resistance within ourselves toward accepting ourselves and our knowledge as valid.... [It means] being critical toward our own thought, which is, after all, thought trained in the patriarchal tradition. Finally, it means developing intellectual courage, the courage to stand alone, the courage to reach farther than our grasp, the courage to risk failure.

(*The Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 228)

I believe that the most courageous thing a woman can do is to trust her own ability to define what her life is and should be, even with the risk of failure. Facing my Church's censure is nothing in comparison with facing the dark abyss of my own self-doubts. When excommunication loomed over me, the thought of sacrificing for the sake of my personal beliefs gave meaning to my life. Without such an external force I have to work harder to construct meaning for myself. Ironically, for good or ill, the outward strictures of society act as a foil which puts in relief the patterns of our own self-definition. Opening ourselves up for growth by keeping the relationship between public categories and private interpretation in a fluid state is perhaps the most difficult of human tasks. It can only happen when we continually challenge the validity of society's structures and the way in which we relate to them. Living with the tensions this creates takes courageous thought as well as courageous action.

Bernard Shaw's Joan of Arc is less sure of her heroism than Maxwell Anderson's Maid. When threatened with being burnt at the stake, she is ready to sign a recantation, until she learns the alternative is life imprisonment. In spite of her doubts, Shaw's Saint Joan ultimately trusts in the validity of her inner voices.

During her trial, one of her accusers asks: "Then your voices command you not to submit yourself to the Church Militant?"

Joan replies: "My voices do not tell me to

Book Review

A Sport of Nature

Nadine Gordimer

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987;
Penguin reprint, 1988.

Reviewed by

Rebecca Piatt Davidson

I first discovered Nadine Gordimer about four years ago when I was doing research for a BYU professor. It wasn't just the fact that I had encountered neither the name nor the fiction before. It was also the fact that I had read narrowly as a graduate student that prompted me to conclude she was a writer of lesser importance—an example of one of the reasons the canon debates rage on. She must be a South African "local color" writer, I decided. The following year Gordimer won the Nobel prize for literature.

So I was wrong.

After that, her name went onto a running mental list I keep of writers I want to check out, but it wasn't until I was in a used bookstore recently in Chico, California, that I came across a whole shelf of Gordimer. But which book to choose? I handled several of her books the way book store enthusiasts do: feeling for a pressure point that causes one particular book to beckon reflexively to a reader. Three-hundred-or-so pages later, after finishing Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature*, I believe I know why this book, though first published in 1987, still begs to be read and discussed. Many critics are convinced that this is Gordimer's masterpiece. I am not a critic, but I nevertheless can see clearly both why this piece beckoned and

disobey the Church; but God must be served first."

Another inquisitor queries: "And you, and not the Church, are to be the judge?"

Joan answers with a rhetorical question: "What other judgment can I judge by but my own?"

"What other judgment can I judge by but my own?" That is the question for every woman, and man, who is concerned with authenticity and integrity.

Today I salute those women of courageous thought and action who, at personal cost and risk, have worked to create a society with the freedom and equality necessary to offer every woman the opportunity to shape her

why some people have never heard of Gordimer.

First, the beckoning. I rarely have the pleasure of stumbling onto a novel that yields so much for me personally. Gordimer's heroine, Hillela Kgomani, is the reason for this. She is unlike any other female character I have ever met in fiction or drama. For one thing, though she is hugely heroic it is not because she is a martyr or victim or even a shaman figure or prophetess. Moreover, though she is fully realized sexually, she is portrayed neither as nymphomaniacal nor fallen. All of the classic oppositions are conspicuously absent in Gordimer's portrayal of her. Hillela is completely un-self-conscious, thoroughly un-Victorian, and invitingly unconventional. She is, as one critic puts it, "a spontaneous mutation"—a "sport of nature." And she has to be that way in order for the book to work. How else would we swallow the idea that an obscure, white, South African girl figures prominently in the dismantling of apartheid?

As a teenager, Hillela lives alternately with two different aunts who take turns raising her in the absence of her mother, who fled the country years earlier with a Portuguese lover, and her father, who travels constantly and thus relinquishes guardianship. She attends school first in Rhodesia but is expelled when she is seen one day with a mulatto boy whose home she has decided to visit. Shipped from Aunt Olga to Aunt Pauline (permanently this time) as a result of the "scandal," Hillela settles in for a time until another scandal erupts that casts her adrift. Content for awhile to try on different jobs and lovers, Hillela remains in South Africa until she is persuaded by a lover to join him in exile. Unlike the lover, however, she has no official papers, and must be

continued on page 6

own life and judge the validity of it for herself. I salute Sally Smith and Jeanetta Williams. I salute Lavina Fielding Anderson, Lynne Kanel Whitesides, and Maxine Hanks.

And I also salute those women, whose names are unknown to most of us, who have had the courage in the face of censure, opposition, and pain to assert their personal beliefs with little or no support from their communities, women like Gay Blanchard, Charlene Ecklund, and Lanette Graves.

And finally, I salute the women of NOW for their support of the women of Utah and the ways in which they encourage courageous action from us all.

Book Review, cont.

smuggled out of the country. With him in Ghana until he departs for Canada (to return “soon”), Hillela now is among exiles: “Those who had disappeared from their countries while on bail, while on the run, while under house arrest; that non-criminal caste of people from all classes and of all colours strangely forced to the subterfuge of real criminals evading justice—they reappeared on foreign sand.” But it is not until later, after becoming involved with and eventually marrying a black revolutionary named Whaila Kgomani, that Hillela’s consciousness begins to change, giving her a genuine desire to espouse his fight for black freedom in South Africa.

When a tragic event takes the life of Hillela’s “obsidian god from the waves,” she goes first to London to work for the organization, and then to Eastern Europe: Stockholm, Oslo, Moscow.

Demonstrating a particular suitability for her new job, Hillela begins to complete the education Whaila had begun. Emigrating eventually to America, she works with intellectuals, senators, heads of state, researching exhaustively, preparing memoranda, delivering lectures to Senate committees on the dangerous consequences of “backing repressive regimes in Angola, South Africa, Namibia, when these countries inevitably would become independent black states before the end of the century—and to whom would they supply their oil, gold, platinum, uranium, titanium, then?” Having long shed the yellow bikini she wore at Tamarisk Beach in her first days of carefree exile in Ghana, Hillela has become a key spokesperson for freedom fighters everywhere in the African continent. Eating with bearded commanders in exile, getting senators to vote funds for black insurgency groups, and rolling off acronyms like USIFACO, TWOCA, OPAD, COCA, CORUD, FOFREP, Hillela now has become a major humanitarian and political figure. Drawn back inevitably and irresistibly to Africa, she continues her crusade and becomes the wife of another black man, Reuel, who accedes to power in West Africa after a period of prolonged exile and fighting (Hillela is his third wife; the other two are black). She accepts an additional name given to her by her new husband, and becomes “Chiemeka Hillela.” An Igbo name from Nigeria, the name means “God has done very well.”

For most readers, the biggest obstacle will be Hillela’s “liaisons.” She goes through a string of lovers before the tale ends, but these relationships (and they are all characterized that way—as relationships) are central to the way in which Hillela defines herself. According to Hillela, physical love is the only honest love: “making love, that’s the only place we can make, here, that’s not just a place to stay.” And if Gordimer preaches about anything in the book, she preaches about the inevitable moral relativity that characterizes the attitudes of individuals living completely outside the bounds of “recognized” law and custom. Gordimer’s skillful attention to this theme may explain the curious way I identify with a female protagonist whose orientation is so thoroughly opposite from my own: Hillela invents categories rather than being circumscribed by them. When her one-time black revolutionary husband asks her what color she imagines the child she is carrying will be, she says, “Our colour.” But Whaila, the husband, only half concurs: “Our colour. A category that doesn’t exist: [Hillela] would invent it. There are Hotnots and half-castes, two-coffee-one-milk, touch-of-the-tar-brush, pure white, black is beautiful—but a creature made of love, without a label; that’s a freak.” Perhaps one of the things that makes Hillela so appealing is how successfully she deconstructs notions about sex, race, and power. When the story ends, outcomes that might have seemed unbelievable or even freakish are seen instead as ineluctable.

And for those of us in the LDS community who live with the obvious tensions implied by the term “Mormon feminist,” this is likely to prove especially rich. The reason: Hillela is a character who can be trusted, and many of us, in contrast, are constantly

White Roses report



A bouquet of a thousand white roses. That was a gift presented to the Church’s General Authorities between the Sunday sessions of October general conference, a gesture of peace and love planned as a counterweight to the bewilderment, fear, and pain of the September excommunications. Ironically, the woman who originated the idea and several who helped plan what came to be known as the White Roses Campaign must still remain anonymous for fear of professional or ecclesiastical reprisals. They have the thanks and gratitude, not only of the September Six, but

also of the hundreds of individuals and families who urgently wanted to “do something” about the harsh disciplining of six scholars and feminists. Some who can be thanked openly are Lara Harris of Provo, to whose mailbox came hundreds of letters bearing checks. She, a group of Provo volunteers, Marti Lynne Jones of Salt Lake City, Erin Silva of San Diego, Scott Fisher of Ann Arbor, and Lorie Winder Stromberg of Los Angeles spent hours on the telephone to create a network of support across the nation.

Shirley Paxman of Provo and Irene Bates of Pacific Palisades, California, made the actual presentation on the Sunday morning of October general conference in the lobby of the Church Office Building. The thousand white roses, arranged in vases, clustered



negotiating the right to trust ourselves and each other.

One of the book’s chapters, entitled “Trust Her!,” is devoted to the exposition of Hillela’s incipient leadership qualities, the foremost of which is that she can be trusted; “Trust her!—that was what others said of her.” It is a phrase repeated many times thereafter, when emphasis is laid on Hillela’s fitness for the path she has chosen. “Trust her, as her enemies would remark. . . . Naturally! Trust Hillela!” Unlike her, many of us will not be invited “as . . . honoured guest[s] to gatherings of socialist women’s organizations in Eastern Europe and feminist congresses in Africa and the West”; nevertheless, in our own way we may anticipate having, like Hillela, a wide and positive influence. We can learn from this character because she knows what it means to be unafraid to choose and to act. She trusts the integrity of her vision, and others are bound to trust that vision as well. Trust of such intensity is equal to power.

Then why is it I’ve never run into anyone who has read Gordimer? Perhaps it’s because the prose style is amazingly dense and rich. This isn’t a quick read, nor is it always relaxed. Gordimer is a tirelessly detailed storyteller, and she exacts a lot from a reader. Moreover, she is dizzyingly precise and accurate about everything: the settings, the historical and political events and intrigues that comprise the novel’s plot, and especially the signifiers used to distinguish black rhythms, cycles, and bodies from white ones or even from other black ones. This is not a novel of overgeneralizations or sentimentalities. In fact, it is Gordimer’s talent for painstakingly avoiding anything approaching the sentimental that gives the novel and its heroine, in my opinion, their powerful reverberance. But finally, it is the novel’s deconstructionist tone, if not agenda, that I find ultimately attractive: it wholly resists being any one kind of story, and its protagonist wholly resists being any one kind of a woman. As the novel closes, the narrator tells us that Hillela “has not been taken in by [Reuel’s] African family: she has disposed it around her. Hers is the non-matrilineal centre that no-one resents because no-one has known it could exist. She has invented it. This is not the rainbow family.”

before a mural which showed Christ, arms outstretched, sending his apostles into the world to preach the gospel. "Let the fear and the reprisals end," read Shirley Paxman from a text prepared by the unidentified planning committee. "The door is always open for them to come back," promised Bishop Robert C. Hales.

Campaign organizers wondered if they could actually create a thousand-rose bouquet starting less than two weeks before conference, but enough pledges poured in to assure the purchase of the roses within a week. Friends called sisters, mothers, and friends in other states. The announcement ran on Mormon-L and LDS-Net, both international electronic networks.

Checks were coming even after conference. There was enough to pay for an advertisement which ran in the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News*¹ the weekend of conference, giving the text of the letter Shirley read and listing the 118 cities from Japan to Bolivia and across the United States, from which contributions had come. There was even enough to send a bouquet a week to a selected General Authority or member of the Relief Society presidency from October 1993 general conference until April 1994 general conference. The September Six,² taken by surprise at the spontaneous gesture, struggled to find words of appreciation to match their feelings. "I know I felt the outpouring of love and support immediately," says Lavina Fielding Anderson. "It still moves me to tears to think of those two wonderful, white-haired women, pleading for us, their children, and laying the roses at the feet of the Savior." Maxine Hanks quipped, "I wanted to present the General Authorities with a case of Maalox because one of them told me that my book 'gave us heartburn.' But the presentation of the white roses was a more generous and positive response." "I much appreciate the gesture of reconciliation and support of those who were involved in the White Roses gift," commented Michael Quinn, "and can only hope and pray that the gesture will result in a greater oneness of all the Saints." "If our Mother in Heaven were designing a protest," said Paul Toscano, "she would do it with flowers. I thank all of those who acted in her spirit to plan and carry out this act of grace." Lynne Kanavel Whitesides said, "I have always known the importance of community—but never more so than in the last few months. Each of those roses represented a strand in the beautiful net which has upheld all of us during this difficult time."

Part of the success of the gesture was its creativity. A protest with roses is gentle, beautiful, nonaccusatory, and nonconfrontational. The envelopes that jammed Lara Harris's mailbox frequently came with notes, some hastily written on yellow post-it notes, others carefully written on thoughtfully chosen cards. Some expressed grief and outrage at the excommunications. Some designated their contribution in honor of one or more of the September Six. Some deliberately gave their Church callings or identified themselves as active members. Almost all thanked the organizers in a wave of gratitude that mounted higher and higher. "Thanks for taking a stand. I admire your courage. God be with you," penned one Utah man. A California letter commented, "I think it is a beautiful gesture!" "Thank you so very much for doing this!" wrote a woman from Maine. "This is a wonderful thing!" One Minnesota woman wrote, "So many of us... just ached when we heard the tragic news. ...Please let them know of our pain and concern." "Please add our six roses as a token of love and respect for our courageous friends," read a note accompanying the contribution of a Utah couple. "We pray that the spirit of love and hope with which we offer this gift will be felt and that hearts will be softened." "It is with genuine heartache that I contribute to the 'flower fund,'" wrote a Colorado woman. "I wish I could do more to express how I feel." "We have been so dismayed by the recent events and have been looking for an appropriate gesture," wrote a Chicago couple. "I hope you have thousands of roses." "We are heartbroken and angry over the recent purges," wrote three from California. "Thanks for helping us do something—however meager," came a note from Minnesota. "Count us in," wrote a

Pennsylvania couple. "D&C 6:17-19," simply wrote "4 of us" from California.³ "Thank you so very much for your willingness to... highlight the need for peace and goodwill and healing between members and church leaders," read a note accompanying an Illinois contribution. "We mourn the excommunication of some of our friends," read the note accompanying the check of a Maryland couple. "This inquisition breaks my heart," wrote one Arizona contributor. Two Rhode Island women wrote: "The Zion we long for is created by the behavior and faith of the honest in heart who put the gospel first, not an exclusive society [made] by casting off those who serve well but disagree with leadership." "Thanks for your help and care of this important statement, so beautifully done," commented a Michigan man. Three sisters and their mother, all from different locales, sent a joint contribution. "We prize our agency and others' too. May the Lord watch over you and love be in you." "Thank you for your creative and sensitive response," came one California response. "Hope you get lots of publicity, touch lots of hearts, and prick some highly placed consciences." "Thank you for your offering of peace in a troubled time," read the note accompanying a contribution from family members in four states. A Utah woman wrote Galileo's stubborn affirmation, "Epparsi muove" ("Nevertheless, it moves"). According to tradition, he whispered it under his breath as he rose from his knees after his forced recantation of his correct description of the solar system.

The irony of identifying the donors by city rather than name did not escape people. One Utah woman wrote, "How tragic... that in what should and could be a church of love, the... reality of people whose fear is greater than their knowledge and love keeps us from using our names." But for others, even identification by place was not safe enough. A California woman penned, "I pray that this [gesture] will help the brethren understand.... Sadly I don't feel I can sign this letter." Many envelopes came with no return addresses. Others risked sending cash through the mail rather than identification. Said Lara, "I don't think anyone will ever know how much courage these gestures of love took. I hope the future will see many more small steps of love that will help us, as individuals and as a church, turn away from fear."

NOTES

- 1 Lara Harris says she was originally informed that the *Deseret News* would not accept the ad and received the usual discount when only one paper prints an advertisement. (Advertising for both the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret News* is handled by the Newspaper Agency Corporation.) The *Salt Lake Tribune* ran the advertisement as scheduled on Saturday, October 2. To Lara's surprise, the *Sunday Deseret News* also included the ad—by accident, she heard indirectly.
- 2 Avraham Gileadi, an Isaiah scholar excommunicated on September 15, has consistently maintained a public silence on his situation.
- 3 "I tell thee these things as a witness unto thee—that the words or the work which thou hast been writing are true. Therefore be diligent; stand by my servant Joseph, faithfully, in whatsoever difficult circumstances he may be in for the word's sake. Admonish him in his faults, and also receive admonition of him. Be patient; be sober; be temperate; have patience, faith, hope and charity."

White Roses Statement: In the spirit of peace, we Latter-day Saints from around the world send these thousand white roses to the General Authorities who have been called to serve Jesus Christ and the members of his church. We entreat you to accept these flowers as a symbol of our devotion to Christ's Gospel of love, mercy, faith and hope. The roses symbolize our support both of the Church and of the members who have recently had disciplinary action taken against them. Therefore, in the spirit of peace, we make this appeal: let the fear and reprisals end. Though the times are challenging and difficult, we find hope in the belief that we can face such challenges with dignity and grace and with the belief that God cherishes diversity, that He loves all his children, and that He does not seek to exclude any who love him from membership in his Church. Each flower represents an individual or family from the following [cities] and other places around the world:
[names of 118 locations follow]

MWF Chapters/Networking

Salt Lake City MWF

Cory Sargent • PO Box 58281
Salt Lake City, UT 84158
(SLC) 297-2120; (Utah County)
370-3839; FAX 801-364-4256

Bay Area MWF

Nadine Hansen
20571 Scofield Dr.
Cupertino, CA 95014
(408) 255-7235

Southern California MWF

Carlan Youkstetter
1685 West Haven Road
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(818) 284-2989

Greater Boston MWF

Lynn Matthews Anderson
70 Fairview Avenue
Belmont, MA 02178

Arizona MWF

Joni Adamson Clarke
4805 W. Snowberry
Tucson, AZ 85741
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Columbus Ohio MWF

Mary Ellen Robertson
1220 Chambers Road 409-C
Columbus, OH 43212
(614) 481-8835

Area Contacts:

Davis County, Utah

Kristie Morton
555 E. 1400 S.
Kaysville, UT 84037
(801) 451-2173

Washington

Melanie Jenkins
NW 385 Dillon, #B
Pullman, WA 99163
(509) 334-3208

Canada

Howard/Zella Forsyth
Box 584 Magrath AB T0K1J0
(403) 758-3549

Illinois

Violet Kimball
15 Crestwood Drive
Edwardsville, IL 62025
(618) 288-5001

Orange County, Calif.

Kathryn Turley Sonne
8581 Kelso Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92646
(714) 968-7186



Letters



Dear Sisters:

I would like to commend Alison Walker for her latest piece of feminist theology, "Redemption or Abuse? Toward a Feminist Interpretation of Atonement" (Vol. 4 No. 3, Nov. 1993). Her paper addresses a very complicated and difficult problem in a clear and understandable way. I appreciate the theological solutions she has presented to this dilemma, which I hope can and will be widely used to help victims of abuse.

Keep up the good work!

Warmest regards,
Cindy LeFevre

Please add my name to the list of information seekers for the next Counterpoint Conference. I want you to know that the work you are doing is inspiring to so many women.

Thanks,
Roberta Giesea

Please remove my name from your mailing list. I have never felt that I don't have a voice in my church. God bless you.

Ann Goddard

I have come through many crises and in the final thought I always find myself in the middle ground. I have many thoughts and questions set aside that I know will be answered someday. I have more than enough light & love from my Heavenly Father to help me always, and so will you please remove my name from your mailing list. I want to be a help to others struggling, but in a more traditional way.

Thanks for helping me to see the best way for me—

Jeanine Shaelling

I am writing to ask you to exclude me from your mailing list. I wish to receive no further information from your organization.

I would like to personally express my feelings of complete disagreement with some of your stands and with your cause, in general. I suspect that throughout my lifetime I have experienced similar dilemmas to many [of those] you have

experienced. I have experienced intense anger and even rage regarding men, domination, lack of personal self esteem, and many, many other issues. Yet, I have found healing and peace come through getting to know my Savior and through full activity in the Church.

I do not wish to be associated with your cause, which I view as contrary to the voice of living prophets and to the voice within myself.

Sincerely,

Linda A. (Johnson) Boice

I finally found an example of marriage I can appreciate. "We're partners. We're in this together. We'll take the criticism together, and we'll work to change things together" (Ed & Chicko Okazaki).

This is so much better than "you don't need to know or do or understand this." This is the attitude some priesthood leaders demonstrate to women and insist on silencing the voices of women who share their experiences of the insensitivity, rudeness and abuse from them.

As sons and daughters cannot be produced without a father and mother, why is it considered apostasy to have respect, love, reverence, and/or communication with our Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother, who are the prototypes of human intelligence, achievement and perfection?

As brothers and sisters of Christ, baptized members of his church, we are commissioned to minister as his representatives, with faith in him and dependence on his power, to love and live and teach the Gospel of peace and joy and serve wherever we see a need.

"The Jesus who cleared the... temple of the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals would never remain silent in the face of the latter-day desecration of his Church by those in positions of power who engage in spiritual oppression. If we are to be true followers of Christ, we must speak out against this oppression whatever the personal risk involved."—Eileen Davis

May our combined efforts produce changes that benefit the whole family of Adam and Eve, sons and daughters!

Rhoda Thurston

Mormon Women's Forum

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