Scholar employs hatchet opportunism in Mormon critique

BY DAVID WARD

"O opportunity! thy guilt is great."
—Shakespeare, The Rape of Lucrece

My dear Harold Bloom, where have you gone, my friend? The School of Resentment is still in session. Inexplicable is the notice that Mr. Bloom has enrolled. This irony, engendered by his November 12 New York Times' article, "Will This Election Be the Mormon Breakthrough?" cannot be lost on the self-proclaimed Jeremiah of New Haven. After all, is the one who coined the phrase School of Resentment to decry the fashionableists of academe who deconstruct aesthetic and spiritual splendor in service of the -isms of the day.

Bloom announces The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as "the Salt Lake City empire of corporate greed." "Plutocratic oligarchs," he belatedly declares.

To be sure, Mormon-bashing has never been politically incorrect, but still, one may ask, where is the evidence to support such rhetoric? Is it in the 7.5 million people who now have access to clean water because of the Church's humanitarian efforts throughout the world over the past 10 years? Or the 550,000 people who have benefited from the Church's vision projects? The 415,000 who have received wheelchairs or other mobility devices? The people of 58 countries who received relief supplies after 119 disasters in 2010 alone?

The list goes on. Millions of Mormons make donations and volunteer their service to bring about such efforts. This is plutocratic oligarchy? Please, professor.

His proclamation that the Mormon prophet is "indistinguishable from the secular oligarchs who exercise power in our supposed democracy" is no less than a gross intentional fallacy on the learned Bloom's part and would doubtless be a revelation to Lloyd Blankfein, Jeff Immelt, et al, not to mention an amusing surprise to the Mormon prophet, Thomas S. Monson. Is there a single person, leader or otherwise, who receives even $100,000 a year from the Church?

I must observe the bias of Bloom's criticism as it moves from oligarchy to Mitt Romney. "How would (Romney) represent the other 98 percent of Americans who are not Mormons?" he asks.

The first place to look is Romney's record representing a state that is less than 1 percent Mormon. Does Bloom go there? Not even close. It's all about Romney's idiosyncratic Mormonism. Should there be a religious test for the office of president, Mr. Bloom? Tell us what we should believe. As for Romney's record in Massachusetts, I would venture that it points more toward his concern for his political, rather than eternal, deliverance. There is a difference.

I'm a promoter of neither Romney nor President Obama. But to say, as Bloom does, that Romney is "deep within the labyrinthine Mormon hierarchy" is to bow to political tendentiousness and slight the truth.

Simple research shows that the church's organization includes a First Presidency (three members), a Quorum of Twelve Apostles, two Quorums of Seventy (about 100 members), and a Presiding Bishopric (three members). These are the general authorities of the Church.

Romney has never been a member of any of these bodies. More than 15 years ago he was a stake president (a lay local leader of which there are thousands), and a bishop (tens of thousands). He is as deep within the hierarchy as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat. So after weak misreadings of oligarchy and Mitt Romney, Bloom comes to Joseph Smith. Why would Bloom write that Smith was a "superb trickster and protein personality" when a month ago he stated to the Deseret News while pitching his latest book: "Joseph Smith hovers in me. There cannot be many Mormons who are imbued with him as I am in my own odd way." For one renowned for his extraordinary memory, this is curious indeed. Or revealing.

Let us debate religion if that be desired. Let us debate politics. Let us debate aesthetics. But let us have none of this hatchet opportunism that mars them all.

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