

VALEDICTORY

We consider the conductor of a religious periodical under as much stronger obligations to seek after and publish the truth, as eternity is longer than any portion of time of which we have any connection, or as the soul is more valuable than the mortal tenement in which it now dwells. . . .

Man in the private walks of life may pursue the paths of virtue and peace, worship the God who made him in sincerity and truth, go down to the grave in peace, and almost unknown, and his posterity rise up and call him blessed. But not so the man that takes upon him the conducting of a public periodical, however innocent, however pure he may be. His motives are scanned, his intentions sometimes perverted. . . . He will be censured perhaps, when he least deserves it in his own estimation, and praised when he merits rebuke. . . .

We had one hope on which we relied when we entered upon the duties of our new calling: (viz.) that by diligence and perseverance we should overcome many of the minor obstacles that presented themselves before us, and contribute our share in promoting the great cause for which this periodical was established. . . .

Our most ardent desires are, that the saints and others, should derive a benefit commensurate at least, with the exertions we have made to do them good.

Warren Cowdery, in his farewell "Valedictory" on stepping down as editor of the *Latter Day Saints' Message and Advocate*, 1837

Some things never change. With a little judicious editing, Cowdery's reflective essay could as easily have been that of three succeeding teams of *DIALOGUE* editors. Indeed after reviewing fifteen volumes of "Mormon thought" to see where the last five fit in, one is struck by how few changes there have been over the years. And this consistency has gone well beyond the obvious parameters of format and subject matter—for which rather clear patterns were early established—to such intangibles as the philosophy and the goals which each new group has surely felt to be independently if not distinctively its own.

DIALOGUE was defined in 1966 through several seminal essays. In particular, Wesley Johnson's "Editorial Preface" to the first issue set forth the "general purposes" of this new journal of Mormon thought. In essence the three basic goals were:

- to stimulate and sponsor excellence in literature and the arts,
- to provide "thoughtful persons" with a journal both "directly concerned with their quest for rational faith and faith-promoting knowledge" and which would "sustain a serious standard of objectivity, candor, and imagination,"
- to offer Mormons the opportunity "to develop their identity, uniqueness, and sense of purpose by expressing their spiritual heritage and moral vision to the community of man."

While *DIALOGUE*'s record was to be one of notable successes in all three of these areas, it was apparent very early that each would not receive equal emphasis. The second of these goals clearly struck the most responsive chord among the mainstay of *DIALOGUE* readers. Many of the young, committed Mormons educated in the fifties and sixties shared a very real and often deeply personal desire, in both heart and mind, for some reconciliation of faith and reason. Not a desire to resolve things in the ultimate sense but to engage in a candid dialogue which would encompass secular as well as ecclesiastical truths and be jointly governed by the rigorous standards of both their spiritual and intellectual heritage. They hoped in this way to illuminate and clarify stress points felt more acutely during this time than before or after. Most of *DIALOGUE*'s character subscribers will remember what it was like.

Keynotes in this now-sixteen-year quest are found in that first issue in Francis Menlove's memorable "The Challenge of Honesty" and Gene England's "The Possibilities of Dialogue." David Bitton followed two issues later with his important perspective on "Anti-Intellectualism in Mormon History." Many landmark articles on various aspects of the Mormon experience, such as James Allen's reappraisal of the First Vision, demonstrated that Mormon scholars actually intended to do what their idealistic essays advertised: apply the highest possible standards of faith *and* scholarship to the most important aspects of their tradition and beliefs. And, as never before, literature and the arts were fostered in a Mormon journal. And Mormons sought openly to enter into "meaningful dialogue" with those outside the faith.

A perhaps inadvertent but nonetheless telltale trail through the minds of the *DIALOGUE* editors can be traced in the little "fillers" and short reprints inserted here and there into empty spaces over the years. The quotations included that first year reflected the goals expressed at the outset. Especially conspicuous were brief statements by Church leaders expressing what might be called Mormonism's "spiritual heritage and moral vision"—the third and "perhaps most important of all" of Johnson's general goals. By the second year, however, (beginning with a reprint of B. H. Roberts's now well-known endorsement of "intelligent discipleship" in Winter 1966) the unmistakably dominant theme of the not-so-subliminal messages was the sanctity of free inquiry. The first of Hugh B. Brown's stirring endorsements of "the questing spirit" was carried, with eloquent or pithy support from John Stuart Mill, Brigham Young, Hugh Nibley, and others. Excepting those special issues devoted to a single subject with quotations selected accordingly, this theme has continued to dominate *Dialogue* fillers and reprints ever since. And articles designed specifically to

inquire openly and responsibly into the Mormon faith-reason interface have dominated DIALOGUE .

What caused DIALOGUE to focus so exclusively within Mormonism? The answer was hinted at later that first year when Editor Gene England spoke to the LDS Institute at the University of Utah on "DIALOGUE—the Idea and the Journal." He had come, he said, "to talk about the possibility of dialogue," but what he really talked about was the *legitimacy* of dialogue. And he placed in support of his thesis many of the quotations which were to appear in the next few issues. In so doing England expressly endorsed a comment made at the Institute several years earlier: "There are much better resources in Mormon theology and the writings of its prophets to defend freedom of inquiry than can be found in those of a heretic like John Stuart Mill." But in actual practice he and his fellow editors were learning that there were no more than a handful of such expressions. Only Hugh B. Brown in the contemporary church hierarchy seemed to be saying what they most wanted to hear—and they quoted him more often and at greater length than anyone else (and still turned twice to the writings of heretic Mill).

DIALOGUE simply was not embraced by the institutional Church, either in practice or in principle. Nor were even the ideals for which it stood endorsed publicly by anyone but President Brown. After nearly a year of publication, it was still DIALOGUE's aspiration—in England's words at the Institute—"to prove ourselves worthy—if not of their [the General Authorities] support [,] at least [their] allowance." DIALOGUE's dialogue clearly was not going to be with the church leadership, nor therefore was any dialogue between faith and reason going to involve those to whom official Mormon thought was formally entrusted. A sharp public response by President Brown's successor in the First Presidency (and future president of the Church) to DIALOGUE's most significant definitional article in the second year—Richard Poll's "What the Church Means to People like Me"—later signalled that even the DIALOGUE-type of member was viewed with suspicion by important Church leaders.

While disappointing, this must surely have come as no surprise to the early DIALOGUE staff. England's Institute address philosophically prepared the way for the relationship which probably seemed inevitable to many from the first:

One of the resources for dialogue in the Church is that we believe in a lay Church. The Church does not belong to any group or any man. It doesn't belong to the General Authorities or the other leaders; it belongs to all of us. It's *our* Church; we're responsible for it, its failures and its strengths. It's up to us to create, in a large sense, what the Church is. And our vision of what the Church can become in the next thirty years will determine in part what we will do to make it what it can become. I believe it can become, can continue to be, the kingdom of God on the earth and want to use DIALOGUE and my life to contribute to that.

Since at this time DIALOGUE and The Church At Large were not ready for each other, DIALOGUE for practical purposes set out on its own "to create, in a large sense, what the Church is." The "Church" thus created was a distinctive

hybrid of Mormon and scholarly idealism which confidently and candidly opened the door to penetrating self-examination, and which (generally) did not shy away from important questions or conclusions. It was an attitudinal church, the "Church of kindred spirits." And new converts regularly bore their testimonies in letters to the editor. "We thought we were alone. What a joy to discover DIALOGUE."

As pathbreaking articles in succeeding years examined with increasing evidence and sophistication many important elements of the Mormon heritage, both editors and readers became aware of a surprising if not astonishing shallowness in their knowledge of important aspects of the Mormon past. And, until a more definitive understanding of what constituted the "spiritual heritage and moral vision" of Mormonism emerged, DIALOGUE could not readily fulfill what its founders believed to be its greatest purpose: propagating this message to the literate, thinking world. The only true dialogue possible between Mormon and non-Mormon was, and continues to be, limited largely to educating outside students of Mormonism about ourselves more or less as we educated ourselves, or (much too infrequently) asking them to place us into the broader context of their studies.

The impracticality of expressing our "spiritual and moral vision to the community of man" did not stop a few early attempts, but inevitably what was presented was a highly personal synthesis ultimately reflecting only the (often progressive) theology of the author. While this may have been advertised as Mormonism, it really was what some *hoped* Mormonism was or would be. Generally directed at difficult social or political issues on which there was no genuine consensus even among thinking Mormons, such subjective expressions were not particularly popular and were soon largely abandoned.

The attempt to articulate a sense of Mormon identity, uniqueness, and spiritual heritage—"half" of Johnson's major goal—did, however, find an early and important place in DIALOGUE, in the form of moving personal essays directed *within*, to the fellowship of kindred spirits drawn together by DIALOGUE. Richard Poll's "What the Church Means to People like Me" has been mentioned. There was also Lowell Bennion's "Carrying Water on Both Shoulders," and many others, later including Richard Bushman's thoughtful reflections on "Faithful History." In a real sense these essays spoke for all DIALOGUE-oriented Mormons trying to come to grips with their increasingly distinctive position within the larger LDS community.

This then was the legacy passed first to Bob Rees and his associates in Los Angeles just over a decade ago, and later, essentially unchanged, to Washington, D.C., five volumes later. It is the same one we entrust to our successors.

Rees tried, with some success, to place greater emphasis on arts and letters, an effort conspicuously reflected in his "fillers". He also occasionally attempted to bring the "spiritual heritage and moral vision" of Mormonism to bear on current societal issues, but again stumbled over the personal theologies on which the authors were forced to rely, however, well prooftexted with suppor-

tive quotations. Overwhelmingly, however, Rees found himself in essentially the same position as had been his predecessors—still defending the value of open discussion, still examining and defining important aspects of Mormonism. His essays, “A Continuing Dialogue” on assuming the editorship and “The Possibilities of Dialogue” shortly before relinquishing it, could as easily have been written by England or Johnson. Overall, to judge from an informal survey we conducted several years ago, *DIALOGUE* readers felt it carried as many important studies during the second five years as during the first. The special issues on music, sex, science, and blacks are still milestones in the history of Mormon thought.

But in one way this second stage in the *DIALOGUE* pilgrimage was significantly different from the first. The intensity of the practical problems was greater than anything before or after.

Much like Warren Cowdery 135 years before, *DIALOGUE* editors generally have found that it is the “many minor obstacles” that take up nearly all of their time, not the idealistic quest for truth. There is *no* aspect of the manuscript solicitation, editing, or production process that cannot go and has not gone away. This is an eternal law. In the context of *DIALOGUE*’s traditionally austere financial and manpower resources, such “minor obstacles” can almost be overwhelming. During the Los Angeles period many such obstacles were encountered, plus a few that were unique.

By the early seventies, much of the intellectual urgency of the previous few years was receding rapidly. This was evident nationally, and it was also true for many who had previously found *Dialogue* essential. Beyond this general mood swing, there were several other developments. *Dialogue* supporters, often bright young graduate students or professionals just getting into new careers, moved into the positions of local church leadership one would expect of competent and committed members. In the process many became so immersed in the overwhelming administrative and counseling problems of the day-to-day Church that little time, energy or—ultimately—inclination remained for the reflective issues which had so engrossed them previously. (And, in fairness, Mormon doctrines and intellectual tradition of the Latter-day Saints, had, and still have, little to do with the everyday Church—indeed, are irrelevant to the practical lives of most members.) Some of these rising leaders were “lost” to *DIALOGUE*.

Another group of *DIALOGUE* “casualties” about this time was those fair-weather friends whose support depended upon tacit endorsement by the Church—an endorsement which, of course, never came. While the Church did issue a neutral announcement about the independent status of *DIALOGUE* back in 1967—much as it might have done for, say, McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*—a clearer message was signalled to many with friends among the Authorities: senior members of the Quorum were displeased. This, or perhaps merely an Authoritative raised eyebrow, was all the lead that many Mormon intellectuals needed to chart their revised course. A few, in admittedly difficult professional circumstances at BYU or elsewhere, supported *DIALOGUE* privately but became

unwilling to be openly identified with it.

Perhaps the most unfortunate group of DIALOGUE dropouts during these years were those for whom DIALOGUE had served as a place of refuge during years of particular religious trauma. While DIALOGUE's successes in holding many of these valuable voices is one of its major accomplishments, for too many the refuge proved to be only a waystation. Paradoxically, those with the greatest awareness of how things really were going at DIALOGUE often were the most vulnerable. For, in addition to the shifting sands of support noted above, it was during these same years that DIALOGUE received its greatest direct intimidation from individual General Authorities or their intermediary "friends." Again like editor Cowdery long ago, the "intentions" of the DIALOGUE staff were "perverted," their judgment faulted. But not in any official way. And now there was no longer Hugh B. Brown, whose release from the First Presidency left DIALOGUE with no remaining visible support at the highest levels within the Church. Fortunately, there was, and continues to be, a great deal of "intermediate level support"—including a few of the less senior General Authorities. Indeed, the role of the local and regional leaders in providing a buffer between the DIALOGUE editors and the personal messages of visiting leaders probably cannot be overstated. They provided an important measure of stability in a difficult time.

There were other relevant developments during these years. One that in retrospect was overrated at the time was the appearance of competing journals aimed at a similar audience. The resurrected *BYU Studies* began to carry essays that bore all the hallmarks of those in DIALOGUE. The *Utah Historical Quarterly* turned more regularly to Mormon studies. Both the *Journal of Mormon History* and *Sunstone* appeared. And a new set of in-house magazines, the *Ensign* and the *New Era*, were issued by the Church with undeniable traces of the DIALOGUE style and spirit in each issue. Given the substantial personal costs of running a "volunteer" journal of the quality of DIALOGUE, these developments raised substantial questions. In the words of a widely circulated open letter by a founding editor, Edward Geary, "Is DIALOGUE Worth Saving?"

A measure of the spirit of these times, a spirit of hope perhaps born of DIALOGUE's early idealism, is that some on DIALOGUE's board believed that with the advent of the new church magazines DIALOGUE was no longer needed. And unquestionably, both the *Ensign* and the *New Era* carried material that previously could have appeared only in DIALOGUE. A more farsighted view prevailed among the editorial staff and most DIALOGUE supporters. There was still only one outlet for innovative or unconventional poetry and fiction, and only one outlet for exhaustive, quasi-definitional articles on the sensitive subjects that were often at the heart of many readers' personal dialogues. There was also only one established, widely recognized, and truly *independent* journal of Mormon studies. On reflection it was apparent that whatever independence or scholarship was found in the others was to some degree dependent on the existence of the strong and continuing presence of DIALOGUE. As some of these related publications have gained increased stature and seeming permanence, it

has become evident that there was more than enough work left for all—and that all have about the same number of readers as DIALOGUE. “Independent thinkers,” it seems, are few in the Church, and they tend to subscribe to everything.

A final but deceptively important factor in the unusual trials of DIALOGUE’s second chapter was the small size of the staff during those years—in part a reflection of all the foregoing—and its great vulnerability to the departure of key people. Under the general circumstances, the loss of even one associate could cause insurmountable problems—and did.

In view of all this, it is quite remarkable, and a credit to Bob Rees and the others, that what emerged from this collective challenge was a distinguished legacy, and an essentially intact, readily recognizable DIALOGUE—only a year or two behind schedule. A more mature *Dialogue*, one now well-educated in subjects it might have preferred to avoid. And a DIALOGUE which, despite all, had pressed forward in its spiritual and intellectual quest.

Thus, by the time DIALOGUE came to Washington, there wasn’t much that had not already been weathered. Its recent public history is well known to readers. The internal record has been—in Cowdery’s apt terms—one of unrelenting, even exhausting “diligence and perseverance [in] overcom[ing] many of the minor obstacles that presented themselves before us.” While the Washington staff was larger than that in Los Angeles, it was still modest in size and accordingly there has been little time to contemplate the unsurpassed importance and beauty of the whole enterprise. We’ve had too many problems with the spelling and the paper stock and the illustrations and the biographical notes and . . .

While we have had our share of excitement and trauma, overall the past few years have been marked by a surprising stability. Safely removed from western rumor mills (but also without the accompanying advantages in access and manpower) and with benign or oblivious local Church leaders, we have felt virtually no hint of intimidation. If anything we sometimes wondered if DIALOGUE has been shouting into a vacuum. Our executive “core,” for the first time in DIALOGUE history, remained intact for the duration. The quality and importance of materials submitted, especially in recent years, has been extraordinary, and authors commendably malleable on stylistic questions. Only money has been a major problem. And still is. It need only be said that DIALOGUE could not exist, despite its considerable readership and “outrageous” subscription rates, were it not for several magnanimous benefactors.

As we look through the shelf of “our” issues, several messages stand out. First, we clearly were proud of the DIALOGUE heritage. Our telltale fillers are by-and-large quotations taken directly from the early issues of DIALOGUE. Important quotations from important articles. We celebrated DIALOGUE’s tenth anniversary with both a special issue and—thanks to the efforts of Gary Gillum—a superb and comprehensive ten-year index. We believed DIALOGUE mattered.

A second message is that there is an increasing depth and insight reflected in

research into the heart of Mormonism's intellectual and doctrinal traditions. Much remains to be done in this area, but—as always—*DIALOGUE* continues to be the vehicle for some of the most thought-provoking and penetrating essays in Mormon thought yet published. It is especially encouraging that the interest and momentum in this important area are on the upswing. As a corollary, *DIALOGUE* has taken the small step of inviting for the first time reviews of doctrinal and historical works published unofficially by various General Authorities. In so doing we in part followed the lead of Warren Cowdery who did not hesitate to find Parley Pratt more at home in oral than written exposition in an early book review. More importantly, we felt that the private commercial efforts of these men were entitled to the same serious consideration accorded others. This seemed especially appropriate when such works dealt directly with those facets of Mormonism on which so much effort has been expended in *DIALOGUE*—intellectual history, and arts and literature.

A third message from our five-volume review is that there was still much new ground to be tilled when we took over the ten-year-old field. We now look back on special sections or issues on the media, women in the Church, the Book of Mormon, the international church, medicine, the Word of Wisdom, and many others and wonder how we could have wondered in 1976 what we could do to fill twenty issues. And that does not count many equally important individual essays and interviews carried over the years. Perhaps inevitably, as we pass on the flame we can think of enough “mandatory” things yet to be done to fill five more years! That is the real excitement of *DIALOGUE*.

A final message is that the basic *DIALOGUE* commitment has remained unchanged through three generations of editors. In addition to the encounter between faith and reason explored in doctrinal and intellectual essays, personal voices, literature, and the arts have continued to have a conspicuous place within each issue.

Like those who preceded us, we have found that there is much still to be learned about what defines Mormonism both historically and theologically. One might suppose after sixteen years, especially with the added contribution of several other journals of similar bent, that all the obvious “first-level” questions would have been thoroughly examined. Our non-Mormon colleagues certainly (almost impatiently) encourage us to move on from specialized descriptive histories to a more definitive treatment of the Mormon faith, a comprehensive synthesis akin to that possible in their secular disciplines. Yet one has only to read the last few issues of *DIALOGUE* to see that scholars are still delineating for the first time important aspects of our faith, aspects which must be clearly understood before essential elements of Mormon history and theology can be accurately described. Mormon studies are just now arriving at a point when we can begin the broader analytical works that will place descriptive history into a meaningful historical or theological context. A truly comprehensive synthesis is yet another step beyond.

In practice, *DIALOGUE*'s early goal of disseminating the “spiritual heritage and moral vision” of Mormonism still awaits two major preparatory steps.

First, a fuller synthesis of the central aspects of the Mormon experience has to be achieved, just as our sympathetic critics have demanded. This cannot be simply a clever or authoritarian but ultimately personal synthesis by a creative or ideological writer. It really must follow the completion of both the foundational analytical studies of which the synthesis will be built and the essential descriptive studies of which it will be built. This should allow us, at last, to avoid the pitfalls of equating personal theologies with those we label "Mormon." There is, nonetheless, a possibility that even the accomplishment of a true synthesis will still leave us with only a thoughtful consensus theology unless the second needed step is taken.

The problem is that the slow, almost ingenuous lay reconstruction of Mormon history has called many cherished notions—even doctrines—into question. The true substance of Mormon doctrine has proved to be surprisingly elusive. This growing realization by thinking, reading Mormons has not, however, been accompanied by any concomitant hierarchal reexamination or refinement of Mormon theology. If anything, recent years have seen a distinctly fundamentalistic retreat in Church manuals and discourse. Much of the present tension between the new Mormon history and members of the Church hierarchy stems from this continuing schism, whether manifest in *DIALOGUE* or elsewhere. It is here, then, that we are in growing need of the second step—an inspired, scripturally attuned, well-read and articulate dialogue with all levels of the Church.

For the present, of course, the Church is in an era of administrative development and growth, requiring administratively gifted ecclesiastical leaders. At some point in the future, however, men of comparable theological sophistication will again be included in the hierarchy, men with the educational analytical studies of which the synthesis will be built and the essential descriptive studies of which it will be built. This should allow us, at last, to this happens, as surely it will, we will probably see one of the most important reconstructions of the faith since the Restoration.

Perhaps these "final" steps will take place during the next decade or so; many would say it will be much longer. In the interim, *DIALOGUE* will continue to do its part, bringing together the best of spirit and intellect. Meanwhile, to conclude in the world in which *DIALOGUE* actually exists, there can be no better benediction than that of editor Cowdery under similar circumstances. For those of us to whom *DIALOGUE* has meant and does mean so much,

"Pray for the [editor] in secret, and pay him in public."