

Monologues and Dialogues: A Personal Perspective

Robert A. Rees

I

“In the beginning was the dialogue.”

— Hugh Nibley’s translation
of John 1:1 (1978, 282).

ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE IS ONE OF THE FIRST EXPERIENCES we have as human beings. Even when our communication is only inarticulate gurgling, we are participating in some kind of communication. Entering into dialogue with another, whether human or divine, is one of the experiences we bring from the preexistence. As Hugh Nibley says, “In the beginning was the Logos [counsel, discussion], and the Logos was in the presence of God, and all things were done according to it. . . .” If that is the pattern of heaven, it should be even more so on earth, where understanding is more critical.

Never was the importance of dialogue brought home to me more clearly than during the six years I edited *DIALOGUE*. Out of those many exchanges — dialectical, impassioned, personal, spiritual, scholarly, and poetic — came many good things. I firmly believe we are in a better place as a people and as a church because of what has been published within the covers of this journal. To begin with, we can now talk about a number of topics openly that we were not free to discuss twenty years ago. And our dialogue is more reasoned and sensitive. On the other hand, there are still too many among us who are threatened by open and honest discussion, and too many others whose voices are silenced by intimidation or fear. We have come a long way; we still have a long way to go.

ROBERT A. REES is assistant dean of the College of Fine Arts, UCLA, and director, Department of the Arts, UCLA, University Extension. He was editor of DIALOGUE from 1971 to 1976. He and his wife, Ruth Stanfield Rees, are the parents of four children — all of them, plus Ruth, currently students at the University of California. He is also bishop of the Los Angeles First Ward, a singles group.

I feel that meaningful dialogue touches every aspect of our lives. In the following pages, I try to say something about the ways in which it is essential to the fully spiritual and intellectual life. I have drawn upon my own questions, real and imagined dialogue, excerpts from a book of sayings my wife Ruth kept of our children while they were growing up, quotations I have gathered over the years, scriptures, and other bits and pieces of human thought and imagination. Together, I hope they convey how important dialogue (and DIALOGUE) is to me.

II

ON EDITING *DIALOGUE*

I was editor of *DIALOGUE* for about six years. It was a very exciting time to be alive and publishing an independent journal among the Mormons. It was a period of great foment in the society at large and this was certainly reflected in the Church. Wes Johnson, one of the first editors, wrote recently about a project he is working on at BYU called the "*Dialogue* Oral History Project," through which a number of people associated with the journal from its inception will be interviewed. I decided to interview myself as a preliminary run-through for Wes's project.

RAR: You were associated with *DIALOGUE* for about eight years, first as book review editor and issue editor and later as general editor. What was it like?

Me: Well, the first word that comes to mind is exhilarating. There was lot of excitement in the air in those days. The idea of an independent journal among the Mormons was still not widely accepted; and in fact, there was a lot of hostility toward not only the journal but toward those associated with it. So part of what we were doing was trying to show there was a place for a journal like *DIALOGUE*.

RAR: How did you do that?

Me: Well, for one thing, we attempted to stabilize *DIALOGUE* financially. We tried to broaden the list of subscribers, solicit contributions from foundations and individuals, and stay on a regular publishing schedule.

RAR: Were you successful?

Me: Not entirely. We struggled with the business matters and our lateness in getting the journal out became something of an embarrassment. We took a number of measures to catch up; but it seemed that with sagging subscriptions, rising costs, lack of staff, and other problems, I often felt like Sisyphus. But why are you asking these questions? Get on to something significant, or at least interesting.

RAR: Ah! It looks as if I've touched a sensitive nerve.

Me: Well, there was a lot of blood, sweat, and anguish that went into those six years, a lot of personal sacrifice; and it seems all some people remember is that we were sometimes late.

RAR: Okay. What would you like to be remembered for then?

Me: Each of the editors has given his or her (with the current editors, his *and* her) special imprint. I have respected the work of Eugene England and Wes Johnson before me and Mary Bradford and Linda and Jack Newell after me. I am not sure what most distinguishes my editorship, but we attempted to publish essays and articles on the most important subjects facing Mormons. We tried to give voice to many points of view, to present reasoned and responsible scholarship, to publish more art and literature, to publish interesting personal voices and religious expressions, to make the journal absorbing.

RAR: Of all the things you published in those six years, of which are you most proud?

Me: That's a hard question, but I suppose the "Black Issue" as we called it.

RAR: Why?

Me: Because it was such an important subject, especially to Latter-day Saints of my generation. Until we published Lester Bush's article, there had not really been a responsible, comprehensive examination of this issue.

RAR: What effect do you feel the article had?

Me: Perhaps it was one of the factors that helped create a climate where the idea of blacks receiving the priesthood could be understood and accepted.

RAR: Do you have any confessions to make about being an editor?

Me: Sometimes I composed letters to the editor.

RAR: What! That's scandalous! Why did you do that?

Me: Because I knew that was the section people read the most and I had some important things to say. It was also a way I could comment on other articles and letters without identifying myself as editor.

RAR: What pseudonyms did you use?

Me: I'm not telling.

RAR: Did you pay any personal price for editing *DIALOGUE*?

Me: Well, it may have cost me tenure because I was devoting more time to it than to some of the scholarly projects my department wanted me to be involved in. I don't regret that, but I do regret the fact that it was a hardship on my family at times. Ruth especially bore the brunt of my zealously to publish an independent journal. She supported me when it seemed that no one else did and did a lot of the hard and demanding work on the journal without ever receiving much credit for it.

RAR: Knowing what you know now, would you volunteer to do it again?

Me: Without question.

RAR: Why?

Me: Because I have a passionate concern for the life of the mind and the spirit in the Church. I love the Church with all my heart, and I firmly believe that it will survive to bless as many people as possible only if there is a climate for open and honest discussion of whatever issues are important to any of us. We don't have anything to fear from free inquiry and open dialogue; we have much to fear from repression of ideas, intimidation of dialogue, and uncharitable judgments. I am an inquiring, thinking person, but I am also a true believer, a faithful follower of the Savior, a devoted member of the Church. I believe I am both of these because of the Church, and I believe I can be both of these in the Church. It is, in fact, a dialogue between those two fundamental, integral parts of myself that I think offers me the best chance of working out my salvation with fear and trembling. In actuality, I don't see how I can possibly escape the tension I often feel between what my mind thinks and what my heart knows. That tension makes for a dynamic life, a life of growth and challenge as intellect and faith have a dialogue with one another. I think that dialogue is essential for the ultimate flowering of the Christian life.

III

ON KNOWING TRUTH

"Truth is a lie."

— Picasso (Kehl 1983, 62)

"I am a lie that always tells the truth."

— Jean Cocteau (Kehl 1983, 15)

Knowing truth is difficult; talking with others about knowing truth is sometimes impossible. Two brief dialogues with my daughter, Julianna, when she was seven illustrate this:

1

Julianna: How do we know Jesus is true?

Me: Because the Holy Spirit tells us it is true.

Julianna: How do we know the Holy Spirit is true?

2

Julianna: How do we know the Church is true?

Me: Because the Holy Ghost gives us a good feeling in our hearts that it is true.

Julianna: What makes our good feeling better than Josh's [the Jewish boy down the street] good feeling?

Obviously I didn't have any answers that would satisfy her.

As Mormons, we sometimes act as if we have all the truth or as if we were the only ones who have truth. Apparently this is not a new phenomenon. A hundred and fifty years ago Thoreau, in commenting on someone who was so self-assured, said, "He was so Mormon-like."¹

On the other hand, we do feel we have been blessed to know that some things are true. I have myself spoken the words, "I know the gospel is true," perhaps thousands of times and they still have a profound and sacred meaning for me. But I am also trained in the scientific method and am skeptical of many things that others say are true.

The problem with having all the truth is that it leaves us closed to all the truth. As William James says, "The greatest enemy to any one of our truths may be the rest of our truths," or as John Cage says, "We learn nothing from the things we know" (Kehl 1983, 49, 20).

Knowing whatever truth we know should leave us humble. The history of philosophy is a chronicle of human inability to come to any ultimate truth through logical or cognitive ways. As Will Durant says in the preface to one of the volumes in his *Story of Civilization*, "I know no more about the ultimates than the simplest urchin in the street" (1957, VIII) The history of religion, on the other hand, (including our own) is a chronicle of the way that "truth" shifts from context to context and from century to century. Apparently Brigham Young believed some things as truth that are now considered false doctrine. And doubtless many of those things we now consider beyond question will indeed be questioned by the next generation.

What does all of this mean for the possibilities of dialogue? Most of all, it means that we need to be open to truth and to revising our ideas about some of the things we "know" to be true. I'm not suggesting that truth is relative, that testimonies are negotiable or that some things are not ultimately true. What I am saying is that all the truth on what is true is not yet in and that we have a greater chance to know more truth if we are willing to have our truths examined. What we do know should leave us humble about how little we know. As Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency said in his 1969 address on intellectual freedom at BYU:

While I believe all that God has revealed, I am not quite sure that I understand what he has revealed, and the fact that he has promised further revelation is to me a challenge to keep an open mind and be prepared to follow wherever my search for truth may lead. . . . We have been blessed with much knowledge by revelation from God which, in some part, the world lacks. But there is an incomprehensibly greater part of truth which we must yet discover. Our revealed truth should leave us stricken with the knowledge of how little we really know. It should never lead to an emotional arrogance based upon a false assumption that we somehow have all the answers — that we in fact have a corner on truth. For we do not" (1969, 11–12).

¹ I first heard this quotation more than thirty years ago in a class on the American Renaissance from Robert K. Thomas at BYU. When I called him, he confirmed that it was an authentic quotation but wasn't sure where it could be located. A scholar at the University of California at Santa Barbara who is editing Thoreau's journals is looking for it.

IV
ON KNOWING GOD

“The world is a kind of
spiritual kindergarten where
millions of bewildered infants
are trying to spell God’s name
with the wrong blocks.”

— E. A. Robinson (1897)

We Mormons tend to be so assured, so certain in our knowledge of God, that it sometimes seems as if there were nothing about him that we feel we don’t know. Thoreau said that some people “speak of God as if they enjoyed a monopoly of the subject” (1970, 282); and in the Church it seems we have no dearth of people who are anxious to tell us what the Lord says on any given subject.

The more I have come to know about God, the less I know of him. If it is true that he created us in his image, then it seems more true that we tend to create him in ours. Certainly my understanding of God has changed over the span of fifty years. When I was a boy, he was surprisingly like my father: while I knew he loved me, I was also scared to death of him and felt that at any given moment I was only a step away from the fires of hell.

When I joined the Church at the age of ten, God became a little less threatening; but during my adolescent years, I was still pretty anxious about our relationship, especially as I was struggling with my emerging sexuality. I didn’t really understand much about the love of God, however, until I took Reid Bankhead’s class, “Jesus the Christ,” at BYU. There, for the first time, I began to understand something about the Atonement and experienced God’s love through his Son in a personal and profound way.

During the ’60s and early ’70s when I was a young graduate student and later assistant professor, God suddenly developed a strong social conscience: he was concerned about civil rights and about the wars on poverty and in Viet Nam and wasn’t any more tolerant than I of conservative, hide-bound, red-necked, anti-intellectual Mormons.

Later as I struggled to raise four bright, independent children and to make a marriage work, God seemed to center his attention on domestic matters. Like me, he was wrestling with the dichotomy between free will and authority, between autonomy and intimacy. God and I both had beards during this time, but I had a lot more trouble with mine than he did with his.

Last year when I became a bishop of a ward with 225 single adults, I began to understand for the first time how hard it must be to be God. I found myself wanting to make things happen outside people’s agency: to make pain and guilt and loneliness go away, to erase the abuse that so many of my congregation suffered as children, to reorient some people sexually, to magically make one member of my congregation fall in love with another. I think of how hard it must be to be God, to see all this suffering and heartache, this deep anguish

of soul and not be able to solve it all and still make agency the central principle of being.

There was a period of time in these years when God and I grew a little distant. I found myself asking him questions which he didn't seem to answer. Our "dialogue" reminded me of the lines from one of Robert Frost's poems:

I turned to speak to God
About the world's despair;
But to make bad matters worse
I found God wasn't there.

God turned to speak to me
(Don't anybody laugh)
God found I wasn't there —
At least not over half (1965, 204).

Only later did it occur to me that God was either not speaking because he himself didn't know how to answer me or, what was more likely, like Job, I didn't know enough to understand the answers that were there all along.

Lately, God has become more real to me as I have had to seek his guidance on a daily basis as a bishop. Because I have experienced his love in my life and witnessed it working in the lives of others, I have come to understand as I never had before what the scriptures mean when they say that "God is love." His love is the one inexhaustible and irreducible force in the universe. It is the power by which we and the worlds move and have our being. He is my father and I am his son, and I am trying to learn to love him better.

But at the same time I am having a more intimate experience with God, I am also getting a new glimpse of his greatness and glory and a greater sense of my insignificance in the presence of his unfathomable mind. And I realize how very little I know about him. This has been brought to me by the daily news coming from the far reaches of God's infinite territory — outer space:

Item: Mysterious arcs, four to seven times longer than the diameter of the Milky Way, curve around clusters of galaxies that are 3 billion light years (that is, 3 billion times 6 trillion miles!) from earth.

Item: Cosmic strings or "threads" of pure energy send off electromagnetic radiation that could induce electric currents as large as 100 quintillion amperes.

Item: One recently discovered superdense star spews X-rays at a temperature of 50 million degrees fahrenheit with 100,000 times the luminosity of the sun.

Item: A neutron star ten miles in diameter is so dense that a cubic inch would weigh 100 billion tons on Earth.

Who is this being, this master of light and time, who governs the vast reaches and regions of space? How can he create a sun 100,000 times brighter

than our sun and still care if I am tolerant or kind or chaste? How can he be so far away that light still travels to us from stars he created trillions of years ago and yet be so near that I can sometimes feel his presence? How can he exist in light and power beyond my ability to imagine and yet lift the burdens from the Saints in my ward? I confess I don't know how; I only know that he does. Like Emerson, I feel that "all I have seen teaches me to trust my creator for all that I have not seen" (8:338)

For me, all the unanswered and unanswerable questions, all the theological and philosophical conundrums, all the perplexities and mysteries come down to these two central and eternal facts: God is, and he loves us.

V

ON THINKING AND IMAGINING

"Perhaps the imagination is the true teleological organ in our evolution, directing all change."

— Ihab Hassan (1972, 177)

"The dimensions of the universe are five: three in space and one each of time and mass. What are the dimensions of mind?"

— Ihab Hassan (1972, 177)

What makes us most human is that we think. What makes us most divine is that we dream. Our brain is used for both — to travel to outer space or explore a world as vast as space within our own subconscious, to dream new worlds and then people them, to create chaos and then order it. There are no newer or braver worlds than those we create each night in our dreams or each day in our imaginations.

What makes dialogue so vital, so exciting, is that we are engaging no less than another potential universe each time we converse. Each mind holds an eternity of memory, an infinity of possibility. A single cortex of the brain easily remembers what it would take even the world's most sophisticated computer much longer to find.

Children, before we teach them to stop wondering, understand the majesty and mystery of the brain, as illustrated by the following dialogue, which took place between my son Maddox, then age nine, and his sister, Julianna, then age eleven:

Maddox: Do you know what's faster than the speed of light?

Julianna: No.

Maddox: I made it up and I think it's right, though nobody else says so.

Julianna: Well, what is it?

Maddox: The speed of brain.

And yet there are those who are afraid of this white star, this exploding supernova in our heads, who would convince us that others are better equipped than we to do our own thinking, who are frightened by the imagination. Anyone who doubts that we should be responsible for our own thoughts should consider the following advice of President Hugh B. Brown to the students of BYU: "Preserve, then, the freedom of your minds in education and in religion, and be unafraid to express your thoughts and to insist upon your right to examine every proposition. We are not so much concerned with whether your thoughts are orthodox as we are that you should have thoughts" (1969, 9–10).

If, as the scientists of the Enlightenment felt, the purpose of human beings is to think God's thoughts after him, we must use our minds more, not less. The Prophet Joseph Smith, whose mind was certainly expanded on numerous occasions, understood this well. He said, "We consider that God has created man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect; and that the nearer a man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views and the greater his enjoyments" (1973, 51).

Joseph Smith also knew the power of the imagination, as the following quote illustrates: "Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss and the broad expanse of eternity — thou must commune with God" (HC 3:295). It is the imagination that makes communication with God possible — or at least richly so.

The most important function of the imagination is that it liberates us. As Wallace Stevens says, "The imagination is the liberty of the mind" (1951, 138). Had we not the capacity to think in images, to feel the power of symbols, to know poetic truth, our minds would be caged and we couldn't effect change. If in the Church we can imagine change beyond policy and practice, beyond culture, perhaps even beyond doctrine itself, we may become agents of change and thereby help transform the Church, even glorify it in new ways. As Ihab Hassan says, "Liberations come from some strange region where the imagination meets change. . . . We need to re-imagine change itself, else we labor to confirm all our errors" (1972, xv–xvi).

One of the dangers of living within an authoritarian system is that it encourages a tendency to take a one-dimensional approach to truth, to see one meaning only in what we are told. The scriptures are poetic and the temple ceremony symbolic precisely because the Lord recognizes that our imaginations have the capacity to find multiple meanings in things. Not to use our imaginations leaves us on a terrestrial plane and deprives us of the glories of paradise. As Wallace Stevens says in *Esthétique du Mal*:

To lose sensibility, to see what one sees,
 As if sight had not its own miraculous thrift,
 To hear only what one hears, one meaning alone,
 As if the paradise of meaning ceased
 To be paradise, it is this to be destitute.
 This is the sky divested of its fountains (1959, 120–21).

VI ON WOMEN

“If it came out of woman, man,
you’d better believe it.” (1970s saying)

The dialogues about women and women’s rights in the Church during the past two decades have been interesting to be a part of. For all of the resistance to it, the women’s revolution may turn out to be the most significant revolution in history, if for no other reason than it has the potential to effect the liberation of the entire human race.

One of the most significant results of the revolution is that it has raised consciousness in many people and has caused a number of Mormons, especially men, to revise their ideas about what it means to be female — and male, for that matter.

As with many burning political, social, and religious issues, there are paradoxes within Mormonism on women’s rights. On the one hand, the idea of a Mother in Heaven is revolutionary and liberating; but on the other, the Church is still strongly patriarchal and male dominated, and many young women grow up in the Church somehow feeling that they are second-class citizens. No rhetoric will erase that feeling; only concrete changes in Church and human behavior will.

The important thing is that a dialogue has begun and will continue; attitudes are shifting. While there are still some instances of gross chauvinism and insensitivity, there are signs — in official programs, publications, and policies, and in the attitudes of individual Church leaders — that we are making progress. And women are beginning to shake the foundations, as illustrated from the following dialogue recorded thirteen years ago between my daughter Jennifer, then thirteen, Julianna, eight, and me:

Julianna: Daddy, why can’t girls hold the priesthood and give blessings and be bishops?

Me: [some obviously weak answer about God loving girls as much as boys, etc.]

Julianna: Gee, even God is a male chauvinist!

Jennifer: Well, Julianna, I believe that within my lifetime, I will hold the priesthood.

Who knows what will happen with women in the Church’s future? Whatever it is, one thing is certain: we can never go back to where we were, and that’s good.

VII
ON CULTURE

“I know the sound of one hand
clapping, but what is the sound of
two hands not clapping?”

— Variation on a Zen koan

Maddox: Do you know what I hate about
church?

Me: No, what?

Maddox: There’s no clapping. If you
really like a good talk,
people ought to be able to
clap.

It is interesting how much our openness to dialogue is related to culture. Mormons come out of the Judeo-Christian tradition with its strong emphasis on rationality. For all our cultural anti-intellectualism, we are far more comfortable with traditional logic than with mysticism or the Eastern “way of knowing.” If one doubts this, one need look no further than the discomfort most Mormons feel with Joseph Smith’s magic and mysticism. We are comfortable with feelings as long as they stay within acceptable limits, as anyone can tell by the uneasiness Mormons experience when someone prays or bears his testimony in other than conventional language. If during a public prayer a Pentecostal visitor begins saying, *sotto voce*, “Yes, Jesus. Praise the Lord,” one can feel the discomfort moving across the congregation like a wave.

Before I joined the Mormon church at the age of ten, I used to go to a Pentecostal church in East Los Angeles and also to one in Long Beach with an aunt and uncle (he played a mean sax in the church’s music ensemble). Those services, which were somewhat strange to me then, were, if nothing else, *alive*. But I have never quite felt elsewhere the rollicking joyfulness of praise and glory that I have felt in black churches I have visited. There it is impossible not to feel with one’s entire body and soul what praise is. James Baldwin, who was himself a preacher in such a church starting from the age of thirteen, speaks of this experience: “There is no music like that music, no drama like the drama of the saints rejoicing, the sinners moaning, the tambourines racing, and all those voices coming together and crying holy to the Lord. . . . I have never seen anything to equal the fire and excitement that sometimes, without warning, fill a church, causing the church, as Leadbelly and so many others have testified, to rock” (1963, 47). Mormon churches don’t rock very often, but perhaps it wouldn’t be such a bad idea if they did. Certainly, as we welcome more and more converts from Third World countries, we may have to revise our ideas as to what constitutes appropriate religious expression.

I have been involved in three conferences of American and Chinese writers over the past four years, one of which involved a three-week visit to China. Being in that "other country" was one of the most remarkable experiences of my life. It opened my eyes to another culture, another way of seeing, in a way I had not experienced before. It was feast of dialogues, not only with the Chinese, but with the American writers as well. It was particularly stimulating and enlightening to have discussions daily with Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, both of whom are Buddhists (Allen, Tibetan, and Gary, Zen). They are equally at home in both Orient and Occident and have forged a connection between the two traditions that allows for the mixing of Zen koans with Western dialectical thinking. Coming out of the Ming Tombs, Gary repeated the following koan:

Emperor: Please set my mind at rest.

Priest: Show me your mind.

Emperor: I have no mind to show.

Priest: There. I have set your mind at rest.

We need to enter into dialogues with other cultures, other points of view, other minds and spirits. We may have something important to learn from the Australian aborigines, from native Americans, from Africans. We may need to let go of some of our prejudices, our ways of thinking, and break through the comfortable walls of our culture if we are to find new truth. As John Sorenson says, "When the time comes that Mormons in the central homeland come to the realization that they too are constrained by cultural ways which have nothing directly to do with the gospel they espouse, the result could be a kind of Copernican revolution with attendant new insights into the Church and the scriptures and the meaning of life" (1973, 27). Let the revolution begin!

VIII

ON DARKNESS

"Hello Darkness, my old friend
I've come to speak with you again."

— Paul Simon (1965)

"There's a darkness on the edge of
town."

— Bruce Springsteen (1978)

"I've tasted darkness, and I like it!"

— reported statement of
an inactive returned
missionary to his
stake president

Everyone is afraid of the dark. Darkness scares me, especially my own. Some people seem to like darkness and even to have a dialogue with it. Mark

Twain's mother used to pray for Satan because she said that of all God's creatures he needed it the most (1969, 44). But a dialogue with darkness, as Melville's Ahab discovered, may have an ultimate price. Melville may have felt, as did the seventeenth-century poet, Henry Vaughan, that in God there is "a deep but dazzling darkness" (1957, 523); but most of us aren't that curious.

I know about my own darkness well enough, but only once in my life have I felt I was actually in the presence of Darkness. This happened during a trip to London last summer. After seeing *Les Miserables*, I walked through the Soho district to get to my hotel; and there on a seamy and squalid street, I looked on the face of darkness. A man, well dressed though disheveled, staggered toward me. As I looked in his face, "his hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin" (Owen 1963, 55-56), his eyes, which didn't see me at all, seemed to contain the very depths of hell. It was almost as if darkness had a sort of light of its own shining out. I had two impulses — to run after him and ask what could possibly have happened to him and to run in the other direction as fast as I could. Instead, I stood gazing after him. Soon, he turned the corner and was gone, but his face is as vivid in my memory as any I have ever seen. I think this was the first time I really understood what the scriptures mean when they speak of the "mystery of iniquity." (2 Thess. 2:7).

Most of us would rather not have a dialogue with darkness — and with good cause — but there is no reason why we shouldn't have a dialogue about darkness. In fact, one could argue that unless we do, darkness will have a greater hold on our lives. There is a reluctance in Mormon culture to talk about the darkness in our past. To the extent that there is darkness at the edge or even at the heart of Mormonism, we can be free from it only as we are willing to talk about it. If anyone doubts this, he should consider how long the dark shadow of Mountain Meadows has fallen on the Church and how much it has receded in recent years as we have faced the truth about what Mormons did on that dark and desolate landscape. If, as Job says, God "discovereth deep things out of darkness" (12:22), we have to believe we can too.

IX ON LOVE

"I would rather be loved than saved."

— from a bishop's
interview

These words haunt me. The woman who spoke them ten years ago was convinced she could not have both love and salvation and therefore had to choose between them. Sometimes the dialogue within us is between the need to be loved and the need to be saved. (Is a love in the arms worth two salvations in the burning bush?) Sometimes in the Church we can't make up our minds as to which is the most important, but always it is a devil's logic that convinces us we must choose. Can there be any salvation without love? And

isn't love itself the highest expression of salvation? Of course, she was speaking of another kind of love: she simply wanted someone to hold her, and the cross seemed a long way from her loneliness.

I have had several conversations with this woman since becoming a bishop last April. I first met her about four months ago when she quickly stuck a tithing envelope in my hand and darted out the door. The second time I was quicker and invited her into my office. She came reluctantly. I knew she had been disfellowshipped for getting pregnant and then having an abortion. She couldn't talk, just shook her head upon my invitation; tears welled in her eyes. She thought she had chosen love over salvation and, in reality, had spent the next ten years out in the cold experiencing neither. But something drew her back, slowly, tentatively. It was, I am convinced, God's love. She is still not sure she believes she is worthy of it, but I feel that in time that love and the love of a bishop and friends will heal her wounded self-esteem.

Nothing is so powerful as love. More than anything, it heals us, makes us whole, infuses us with light and energy, transforms us. It is the power that makes us godly and ultimately can make us gods. It is also the power that makes true dialogue possible.

In *The Road Less Traveled*, Scott Peck defines love as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." He adds, "The principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love another we give him or her our attention; we attend to that person's growth. . . . By far the most common and important way in which we can exercise our attention is by listening" (1978, 81).

Perhaps God speaks to us in a still, small voice so we will have to work harder at listening. As we strive to listen to the quietness and subtleness of his voice and as we plead for him to listen to ours, we become more adept at listening and talking to one another. As our capacity to love increases, we become less argumentative, less strident, less judgmental. Out of love, we may still be critical and even confrontive, but our motives will then be nurturing the other person's spirituality, not winning an argument or putting another person down.

It is easy to be abstract about love, to say we love the whole world or everyone in our ward. Far harder it is to love someone who lives in our home or perhaps even our home teacher. It is actually within the small circle of the people who are closest to us that we learn to love and then to grow outward from that center. Christ is the only one who can truly say that he loves the whole world because he loves each one of us personally and particularly in a way we are incapable of. But we can love those we are called to love.

It is here within the landscape of our daily lives that love makes its meaning. It is on this ground where we must learn the heart's work. As Robert Frost says in "Birches" (where he speaks of getting away from earth for awhile): "Earth's the right place for love;/I don't know where it's likely to go better" (1965, 78). This reminds me of a dialogue I had with my son, Maddox, when he was six:

Maddox: Dad?

Me: What?

Maddox: I want to watch you when its time for you to go to heaven. I'll bring all my friends.

Me: Why?

Maddox: So we can all grab hold of you.

Me: Why would you want to do that?

Maddox: So you couldn't go to heaven and would have to stay here.

Earth is the right place for love — our's and God's. It is interesting to note that we don't seem to be able to escape from his love. Even when we run from him, the freedom to run is a gift from him.

I thought about this during the past Christmas season. I consider myself a faithful disciple, or at least a disciple who tries to be faithful; and yet as I have examined the breadth and depth of my commitment to him, I have the sense that something may be lacking. I see myself in my imagination bringing my gifts to lay before him, but perhaps there is something I have not brought, one gift I may have kept back for myself. Perhaps it is something I have not been willing to sacrifice, or a sin I have not fully repented of, or some weakness I am not willing to come to terms with. My feeling may be something like that expressed by Annie Dillard in a recent essay: "[God], I ran from you. I am still running, running from that knowledge, that eye, that love from which there is no refuge. For you meant only love, and love, and I felt only fear, and pain. So once in Israel love came to us incarnate, stood in the doorway between two worlds, and we were all afraid" (1982, 141).

In some sense, all of us stand between those two worlds, and speaking and listening to one another helps us to reconcile them. It is that task, entering into meaningful dialogues, that we must learn to do better. I am still striving to learn how to have better dialogues — with God, with his Church, with my wife and children, with my brothers and sisters, with myself. Love gives me hope.

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