

# Letters to the Editors

*The sketches in this section are by Jerry Pulsipher, a frequent contributor to DIALOGUE.*

Dear Sirs:

I have been very interested in *Dialogue* since its beginning. Congratulations for a "job well done" in the face of tremendous obstacles. Particularly, I have admired the broad coverage you have given the Egyptian Papyri situation. Learning the fuller details, insofar as we are presently able, may shake a few people's faith, but probably not many. I think that we should be able to survive learning that God expects each person to learn his individual responsibility in discovering where full truth lies, and to learn that the position of a Prophet is most complex wherein he must blend his fullest personal abilities as a man with available revelation, after he has exercised those personal abilities to their fullest.

By the way, I was interested, if not surprised, that none of the writers analyzing Joseph Smith's Book of Abraham, as a product compared to the few lines under reference from the Papyri, ever considered that Joseph could have been very naturally using the Urim and Thummim through which he received the total story expressible in his own idiom, something scholars of a dead language admittedly can never master. Of course, this poses a question that to my knowledge has never been answered relating to the disposition of the Urim and Thummim. I know of no place where reference was ever made that Joseph returned the Urim and Thummim! Nor do I see any logical reason that he should have, since the instrument was a traditional mechanism used by prophets to communicate with God.

In other words, I can heartily agree with Brother Nibley when he concludes that far too little is known concerning the papyri possessed by Joseph, the ability of the scholars to deduce the subtleties of a dead language, or the purposes and extent to which Joseph was restoring a lost scripture to attempt to bind the Book of Abraham to the fragment papyri of The Book of Breathings.

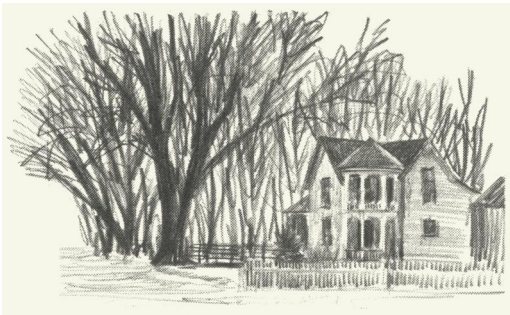
Laurence C. Cooper  
Cedar City, Utah

Dear Sirs:

It must be a constant debate in the minds of the editors of *Dialogue* what its role would best be. In the last several issues, it has become evident that the editors have decided to try to appeal to conservatives by covering issues normally taken up by the obsequious *Era* and the defensive *BYU Studies* and ignoring social and theological issues almost entirely neglected by those publications. Perhaps this shift is necessary in order to placate conservatives' criticisms of the journal and to gain subscribers for it from among those only marginally interested in "the weightier matters of the law" that it has discussed in the past.

But it seems to me that to satisfy all factions and attitudes in the Church and to cover all bases would require a considerable compromise with principle. No journal can hope to satisfy everybody; *Reader's Digest* has something for everyone but has little or no effect because it is so superficial. *Dialogue* has its effect by going into depth on subjects that perennially get distorted

into superstitions in pulpits, classes, and publications in the Church. What *Dialogue* should be able to do best is to make solid the thoughtful liberal position often espoused on its pages. There is, to be honest, no other place in the Church for the expression of such. At this point in its history, the danger is that *Dialogue* will go the way of our sacrament meetings, communicating the gospel at the lowest common denominator only. *Dialogue's* impor-



tance may lie not in converting the conservative to a sane and truly spiritual Christianity but in making the truth strong.

Please don't go out into the fields to gather in the sheep who might possibly look your way. Instead, build a magnificent fortress where a light can shine out over all the land. The good light will most certainly attract those who care about the truth. To reverse an old adage, in strength there are numbers.

Mrs. Elfriede Fercalek  
El Cajon, Calif.

Dear Sirs:

The reviews of Stanley P. Hirshson's book on Brigham Young, *The Lion of the Lord*, seem to have overlooked an essential aspect of this work. I can well understand the dismay of Donald R. Moorman and Chad J. Flake in trying to assess the book as biography and history, because it simply doesn't fit these categories. It is no more biography than is *Pilgrim's Progress*; it is as futile to compare it to Mormon historical works as it would be to measure *Gulliver's Travels* against Richard Haliburton's adventures.

It is a commentary on the extreme paucity of humor in Mormon literature that no reviewer has, to my knowledge, seen the

Hirshson work for what it actually is, a joke book. Viewed as such, it might be more charitably received. It is a veritable gold mine of anecdotes, bits, yarns, gags, jokes and one-liners. I found it screamingly funny, and I predict the book will become invaluable for scholars looking for a little spice to liven up the heavy research.

Small wonder that in writing a joke book Hirshson should ignore the material in the Church Historian's Office. These tremendous archives contain few laughs. He went to exactly the right sources for the type of book he produced. Instead of being denounced for his deficiencies as biographer and historians, he should be commended for his pioneering work of humor. He has collected more howlers about Mormonism than any other author has ever put between two covers.

Samuel W. Taylor  
Redwood City, Calif.

Dear Sirs:

I just received, with great rejoicing, the spring issue of *Dialogue*. Most of my rejoicing is for Douglas Thayer's story, "The Opening Day." Would it be possible for me to obtain about thirty offprint copies of the story by September 30th? I would like to use the story in a special section of Freshman English I will teach this fall.

Bruce W. Jorgensen  
Director of Composition  
South. Utah State College

Dear Sirs:

It seems to me that it seems to Louis Midgley ("The Secular Relevance of the Gospel," Winter 1969) that conservatives are by and largely a bitter bunch of hypocrites. Our problem, Louis C., is thee, and thine; far more so than the hypocrites amongst us. For it is the problem of an historical capitulation to cancer; the difficult problem of dealing with frontrunners for the Party Line. Your kind, Professor, will do us in yet, if allowed to get away with your twisted tongue ties with the collective voice throwers, among other things. Your half-truths are far more execrable than the rationales of the Right because It [the Right]

is not poised on the leading edge of world takeover — and if it were, would still be nearer *my* God than thee. Because conservatism allows for the legitimate exercising of free agency — in point of fact is hinged on it. In the collective, the choice door is slammed shut, and all are “good” by fiat.

If *we* changed, and were suddenly no longer in a state of consumption with the Nephite Disease, would that *alone* change the dirtycommies . . . ? They may not “be healed by the gospel” soon enough for it to do any good . . . to . . . *us* . . . or . . . the world, since as we go, so goes it. And we have a higher duty than to surrender to Satan. Or have the liberals forgotten about the kingdom of God?

I must take exception to the professor’s conclusions about the way to overcome the world — that is to say, to be not of it. It is he and his kultured klass kind who are leading this country into slavery. And I say with all studied seriousness that we are being led to capitulation just as sure as shooting. While Russia presses steadily on for a knockout punch — or just the irresistible threat of one — we are told not to rock the boat, not to do anything to antagonize the enemy — we are told, then, that the answer is to nonresist evil; and presumably it will thereby go away, or at least not bother us soul-saved saints. Or is it even evil after all? Not according to the gospel according to S. Rigdon.

And no, Midgley. You are going — admit it — for a classless society in this equality interpretation, where in reality men are not equal that way and never will be and viva la difference, say I; for it *allows for growth*; for challenge and self-discipline; and in any society that does not have enough of all for all, it rewards accordingly, being the natural distributor of the material produce. Hairy humanists would artificially dampen down the availability of the matter is the matter; so that all would have equally, therefore to do away with envy. Which way does not do away with it at all, of course, just doesn’t allow to be called up what’s still in there; and what will still come out, sooner or later, until it is dealt with directly.

I suggest you re-reason your position, using less of the questionable philosophy in the Book of Mormon and more of the

innate intelligence you were born with. That is to say, to think for yourself, and not let others do your thinking for you. A difficult thing to do in the Mormon church, I grant you, with the power coming from on high and all that . . . .

Sorry if I seem to contribute to the corrosive confrontation between the wings of this house divided. I don’t question the integrity of your viewpoint. I question its wisdom. Granted, when we “seek not the Lord to establish his righteousness” we run into error. But a greater error is not to discriminate: is to allow ourselves to be duped into living in satanic servitude, and thinking, Oh, well.

Duane Stanfield  
San Leandro, California

*Professor Midgley responds:*

Dear Sirs:

I am sorry that Mr. Stanfield has received with considerable consternation the news that his particular political ideology is neither consistent with the gospel nor supported in the scriptures. It is commonly assumed that this or that worldly ideology is an obvious corollary to the gospel. I tried to show in “Secular Relevance of the Gospel” (Winter 1969) that nothing could be further from the truth. It is disheartening to find that Mr. Stanfield is now quite ready to jetison the Book of Mormon rather than his particular political ideology, one, incidently, he admits is inconsistent with the teachings of the Book of Mormon. I do not believe that most Latter-day Saints will readily follow Mr. Stanfield’s advice about “using less of the questionable philosophy in the Book of Mormon and more of the innate intelligence” one is presumably “born with.” In addition, his insulting remarks about what he calls “the Mormon church . . . with power coming from on high and all that” may not endear him with those saints who believe that they are members of the Church of Jesus Christ. Mr. Stanfield sees the Church as a “house divided” and refers to the “corrosive confrontation” now occasionally taking place between those of his or some similar persuasion and those who strive to remain consistent with the prophetic message of the scriptures and the

authentic witness of the spirit. I believe that the "corrosive confrontation" Mr. Stanfield mentions is a direct product of the very common desire among the saints to find an accommodation between some feature of our culture and the gospel. In the case of Mr. Stanfield, it is obvious that his views are more or less typical of what is called Social Darwinism. I believe, however, that the Prophets who speak for God are better guides than Charles Darwin or Herbert Spencer and their "conservative" friends on the so-called American political "Right-Wing" and certainly the prophets do a better job than those who merely use "the intelligence they were born with."

Mr. Stanfield is angry with me for quoting with approval Hugh Nibley's remark about the prophetic warnings in the Book of Mormon about the dangers of inequality in communities. It is instructive to compare Mr. Stanfield's remarks on the desirability and necessity of inequality with the teachings found in, for example, the Doctrine and Covenants (see e.g., 49:14; 70:14; 78:5-6) where it is made clear that "the world lies in sin" because some men "possess that which is above another" and that

do not see clearly the way to overcome some threat does not mean that the Lord cannot in his own time take care of the matter.

Finally, the "cute" little remarks about my "leading this country into slavery" or "going — admit it — for a classless society" are absurd, false and, if stated in less oblique language, a form of personal slander that is perhaps legally actionable and also a good example of the lack of charity which is common to worldly political discourse but which the saints might well not copy.

When it is brought to their attention, the saints, I believe, quickly realize that the scriptures present a radically different message than that found in the narrow, radical political ideologies currently being advanced here and there in the Church. All efforts to align the Church with political mass movements and worldly ideologies are serious threats to the spiritual welfare of God's people because they divide the Church, causing what Mr. Stanfield calls "corrosive confrontations," and direct the attention and energies of the saints away from the gospel and the Kingdom of God. Those who engage in such activities often show a profound lack of confidence in the Lord and his power to accomplish his plans.

Louis Midgley  
Provo, Utah

Dear Sirs:

"He jammed his fingers down her throat." "He saved the epileptic's life." These two sentences describe one and the same action. He didn't perform two actions but only one: that is, he saved her life by recovering her tongue which she had swallowed and thereby saved her life. Here is simply one event which is described in two very different ways.

Professor Richard Bushman in his essay "Faithful History" (Winter 1970) acknowledges that historians no longer completely accept Charles Beard's interpretation of American history. It is interesting, however, that Dr. Bushman himself seems to still accept some views about historical writing which Beard and Carl Becker espoused. What Dr. Bushman says about historical "facts" could almost come straight from a famous essay on the same subject by Becker.



we "cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things" unless we "are equal in earthly things."

Mr. Stanfield is also very worried about Russia and the Communist threat. He fears both because they would restrict freedom and frustrate the Kingdom of God. On both issues I can agree with him. But what are we to do about such things? His letter does not offer a clear program. I part company with Mr. Stanfield when he begins to suggest that the Kingdom of God can somehow ultimately fall prey to the Communist threat. Oh ye of little faith! Because we

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Dr. Bushman says that facts are not "pre-determined." They can be selected and molded. By molding them the historian "cannot escape sculpturing the past. . . ." Such talk about "facts" conceals a crucial ambiguity: that facts can be taken as (1) events themselves, and (2) as true *descriptions* of events. By running these two ideas together an important mistake can be made: namely, the mistake of believing that changes in one's descriptions change, or "mold," or "sculpture" the events themselves. Once the event is over, it cannot change. But, our descriptions of it can change. We can provide various true descriptions of any event, as the little example of the man saving the epileptic demonstrates, but our descriptions are always bound by what actually happened, if we want to give *true* descriptions. Dr. Bushman seems to sense this when he says, "I do not mean to say that historical materials are completely plastic." But what he doesn't point out is that *facts*, if interpreted as *events*, are not "plastic" at all. On the other hand, when facts are interpreted in the second way as *true descriptions of events*, we are still bound by whether or not the descriptions are *true*. I agree that very diverse true descriptions can be given of any event, but I would like to stress that the two mentioned limitations considerably circumscribe the historians activity, and make it much less arbitrary and more objective, than seems to be suggested by Dr. Bushman.

I also have some serious misgivings about other sections of Dr. Bushman's important and interesting essay. His discussion of faith seems to me to restrict faith only to religion and only to one kind of historical activity, which sounds suspiciously like apol-

ogetics — not history — to me. He suggests that we relate the categories of faith to our professional practice. I would like to believe that proper faith is not so categorized, that it is not only "religious faith," but faith that suffuses through one's outlook and activity. Personally, I find such faith even in the work of what Dr. Bushman might call economic or political histories by Mormon historians. This essay, along with its sequel "The Historians and Nauvoo" (Spring 1970), are deserving of further attention.

Kent E. Robson  
Logan, Utah

Dear Sirs:

I would just like to say that I always enjoy reading Dialogue — both of my sons are subscribers and I always get to read it one place or the other. There are always not just one, but several articles in each number that are stimulating. To list just a few: Thomas Asplund's "Heart of My Father," Dennis Smith (both poetry and art), Ralph Reynolds' pen-and-ink graphics that are so "tough," Clinton Larson, Wayne Carver, Sam Taylor, Karl Keller (I *like* to think I know what he says), T. Edgar Lyon and many others.

I read Douglas Thayer's "The Red Tail Hawk" and thought it was superb. A couple of things about it reminded me of the prize-winning short story "The Ledge." I am not any judge of the short story — I just read a lot of them, exhausting the public libraries volumes of O. Henry Memorial and O'Brien collections and current periodicals, but I enjoy equally those I read in *Dialogue*.

Maxine Lind  
Salt Lake City

