

A Continuing Dialogue

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You young people live in an age when freedom of the mind is suppressed over much of the world. We must preserve it in the Church and in America and resist all efforts of earnest men to suppress it. . . . Preserve, then, the freedom of your mind 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 or heterodox as we are that you shall have thoughts.

President Hugh B. Brown
(B.Y.U., 13 May 1969)

Although it has been over five years since I received the first issue of *Dialogue*, I vividly remember the excitement with which I opened it and devoured it in one sitting. I suddenly felt a renewal of faith in myself and in my fellow saints. I discovered that there were Mormons who shared not only my concern for the life of the mind in the Church, but who also shared some of my deepest feelings about the life of the spirit in the world, who seemed unafraid to think, to explore, to question — and unembarrassed to fast, to pray, and to testify.

It can probably be said that *Dialogue* was an inevitable result of a generation of young Mormons who came of age in the 50s and 60s, whose faith was tested in the colleges and universities, in the cities, and in a world of dramatic social change. It was a generation who felt a tension between a cultural provincialism and an inherited racial prejudice on the one hand and a gospel of openness and brotherly love on the other. It was a generation who were not willing to sacrifice their Mormon heritage in order to take their place in the world — a world they did not feel completely prepared to encounter. Out of this experience came a new concern by young Mormons to make the Church more relevant to their lives and at the same time to make their lives more useful to the world through the gospel.

Dialogue is perhaps the most conspicuous manifestation of that concern as well as an affirmative answer to a question raised by Thomas F. O'Dea in his book *The Mormons*: "Can the church make the accommodation to modern thought necessary to satisfy the concern with truth that its own teachings have created in its more intellectual members and, at the same time, maintain the basic articles of faith without which it will certainly cease to survive in its present form?"

It has been *Dialogue's* hope to improve the quality of life in the Church through increased tolerance and understanding by fostering a climate in which members of the Church could express their deepest feelings and thoughts about their religion and their lives; it has encouraged an exchange of ideas, opinions, and testimonies and has attempted to get Mormons (as well as non-Mormons) to talk to one another and, especially, to listen to one another. It has sought frankness and honesty in its attempt to define and explore ways in which we as a people can come closer to fulfilling our promise.

And *Dialogue* will continue to do this, by seeking responsible expressions — personal, artistic, academic. It will continue to speak to those who have left the Church and challenge them to re-examine their faith, to give the Church a new chance; and it will continue to speak to those in the Church who are closed and complacent and challenge them to a greater love and patience with their brothers, in and out of the Church.

If *Dialogue* has not been entirely successful in fulfilling the hopes of its founders (see Eugene England's essay later in this issue), it is due in part to the fact that some have been unwilling to join in conversations about our origins, our problems, our hopes and our beliefs. At times these same people have been critical of what they see as a liberal bias in *Dialogue*, but if such a bias exists they must concede that it does so by their default, for the editors have continually sought to establish a forum in which various points of view could be expressed.

Dialogue will continue to reaffirm that aspect of our tradition in which we have been willing to examine all things and to hold fast to that which is good, in which we have been unafraid to let others examine and explore those things we hold as truth, in which we have been willing to consider alternatives and to change. From the beginning there have been those in the Church who were unafraid to live the Gospel in the world, whose conviction of the truth and its ability to make men free caused them to defend it against all foes, who were open to the experience and revelation of truth, not only from above, but from wherever it might come.

A recent confirmation of this tradition was the talk entitled "Freedom of the Mind" given to the student body of Brigham Young University in May 1969 by President Hugh B. Brown. President Brown said some remarkable things that day, including the following:

One of the most important things in the world is freedom of the mind; from this all other freedoms spring. Such freedom is necessarily dangerous, for one cannot think right without running the risk of thinking wrong, but generally more thinking is the antidote for the evils that spring from wrong thinking. More thinking is required, and we call upon you students to exercise your God-given right to think through on every proposition that is submitted to you and be unafraid to express your opinions, with proper respect for those to whom you talk and proper acknowledgement of your own shortcomings.

Dialogue feels that it is important for us to cultivate a climate of exploration and discussion so that we will be more willing to have communion (both in the modern sense of "an interchange of thoughts and interests")

and in the original sense of "fellowship") with another, so that we will be more willing to consider, to understand, to forgive, and to accept.

It was in part a willingness to enter into a dialogue (that is, to open oneself to be taught and inspired) that led Moses upon the mountain, and Lehi into the desert, that led Paul to Athens and Corinth. It is the same spirit that led Joseph into the light of the Restoration on that spring day in 1821. And it is that same spirit that we must open ourselves to if we wish to sustain a continuing dialogue.

