Letters to the Editor

song of glory

Robert Rees (in his letter in the Spring, 1977 issue) finds it "hard to imagine a celestial world filled with more heavenly strains or deep spiritual joy than one finds in the great Christian music of Western civilization." Having been to Israel, I don't find it hard at all to imagine, because I have heard The Song of Glory (Shir ha-Kavod, or Anim zmirot) and can testify that this is as beautiful a piece of religious music as anything produced in the West. After all, Hebrew music is what Jesus himself as well as Isaiah, Nephi, Paul and all the prophets of Israel used to sing.

Benjamin Urrutia
Guayaquil, Ecuador

the narrow way

I believe Karl Keller (See Letters Section, Vol. 11, No. 1) is right in many ways. But I think his view of *Dialogue* and its function may be a little restrictive. It doesn't, for example, count the purely informative material—like that in the current issues on RLDS/LDS, Eliza Snow and O'Dea. Besides, even though some matters may have been resolved in the Middle Ages, it doesn't mean they have been resolved in Saskatoon or, I suspect, in Arizona—and perhaps elsewhere. As for the contradiction of the Mormon intellectual—well, maybe so . . .

Lewis Horne
Saskatoon, Canada

the gilbert challenge

In the Autumn 1977 issue Cecil A. Gilbert issued a challenge to provide "any scriptural evidence that a person's premortal life determines his place in the present mortal life." If premortal considerations played no such role, then it would seem to be purely a matter of chance. Yet the Lord has said, "Behold, mine house is a house of order . . . and not a house of confusion. . . . And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?" (D&C 132:8,11). The revelation of the Lord to Abraham recorded in Abraham 3:22-23 indicates that among the pre-existent spirits there were some who were "noble and great" and the Lord said of such, "these I will make my rulers." The entire doctrine of foreordination implies some pre-existent worthiness for the ordination. Alma (Alma 13:3) stated, "And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God, on account of their exceeding faith and good works. . . . " This concept of the Lord having a deliberate part in the pre-existence in determining a man's responsibilities, "bounds and inheritances" is further substantiated in Romans 8:28-30 and Deuteronomy 32:7-8.

A danger exists in dogmatically asserting that the good and noble ones of the pre-existence will always have the most favorable and comfortable circumstances in this life. Is it not possible that a loving Father would send some of His weakest spirits to those situations where they would have the greatest opportunity to hear and accept the gospel, and some of His more "valiant" children to less favorable areas of the earth? To those who subscribe to the theory that little children who die are guaranteed salvation because of premortal worthiness, does not the fact that nearly half the population of some underprivileged countries die as small children indicate that larger proportion of the best spirits are going to those locales? It would seem to be a dangerous misapplication of the premortal worthiness concept to feel smug or superior because of having been born in this country or within the Church. Perhaps one is born into favorable circumstances because a loving Father wanted to give an unstable spirit a fighting chance to return to him.

Certainly all the information is not in, and dogmatism on either side is fraught with danger, but one seldom goes wrong in listening closely to the brethren. Regarding scripture Hugh Nibley wrote, "to read is by very definition to unriddle, to expound to one's self, to interpret. In the reading of the scripture we must always

have an interpreter. But who qualifies for the task of interpreting God's work to men?" His answer is the Lord and continues, "without a living prophet, the scripture is indeed what the Medieval Church called it: a mystery." (*The World and the Prophets,* pp. 185, 188). One would indeed have difficulty in finding a prophet who interprets the scripture as excluding any effect of the pre-existence on our mortal situations.

Lee Smith
Salt Lake City, Utah

fan mail

I have so enjoyed all the issues and particularly the Media and Sexuality issues. The article "Passive Aggression and the Believer" by K-Lynn Paul was very interesting. As I sat in Sacrament Meeting last night with the last speaker rambling well over his time and thus undoing all that the previous speakers had done, I recalled the article "Speaking in Church" by Nels Nelson and took heart!

Olga M. Caddick
Manchester, England

As always, your latest edition is a sleep robber. Keep up the good work and my subscripiton active. *Fortune Magazine* came in the same day's mail and, by way of contrast, despite face lifting, it promptly put me to sleep.

Marc Sessions
Los Angeles, California

ERA again

I think many political and social liberals in the Church live in apprehension of a day when they will be trapped between the conflicting pressures of personal conscience and existing or new church doctrine or policy. This choice became painful and real for me during the Florida legislature's debate on the ERA in their 1977 session.

From 1974 to 1977 I was an Executive Assistant to Florida's Speaker of the House of Representatives, Donald L. Tucker. He is a six-term Democrat, a moderate and a considerable power in Florida politics. He is also an active Latter-day Saint.

On three previous occasions Tucker voted for ratification of the ERA in the Florida House. He had campaigned for reelection in support of the ERA and in 1977 was one of 62 co sponsors of the House bill. All of this occurred before the Church took a formal position on the Amendment. In 1977, even in the face of newly announced church opposition he was regarded as a solid supporter. One of the Speaker's hallmarks in the legislature was that he always honored his word once it was given, and he had given it many times on the ERA.

This time the main battle would be in the Senate, which had defeated the ERA on three previous occasions. They would consider it first this year, a defeat meaning that it would never reach the House. The House had ratified the amendment in two previous sessions, and both sides

conceded that the pro-ERA coalition had a large and comfortable margin in the 1977 House (in no small part due to Tucker's steadfast support).

On March 27, 1977, a little over a week before the Legislature convened, I wrote in my journal that the Bishop was instructed to read an article from the *Ensign* by Boyd Packer denouncing the ERA. This was especially difficult for the Bishop to do because of his very long and close friendship with the Speaker.

To the surprise and discomfort of a great many faithful Saints the Church had now taken a hard, official position in opposition.

Two days later I had a long conversation with a committed member of the Church who was deeply troubled by the new position. He was an individual whose profession required a public position on the ERA, and he had voiced strong support. He was considering withdrawing from that position, a move which would result in enormous professional injury to him. Like myself, he was especially troubled at the five-year lag between the arrival of the ERA as a major national issue and the Church's tardy decision to oppose.

On Sunday lobbying on the Speaker by other Saints became so great that the Bishop made a plea in Sacrament Meeting to leave the man alone on his day of rest, suggesting that they get an appointment with him during office hours. During the next two weeks the lobbying by the various factions on the Senate side became so intense that it stifled almost all other legislative matters, and the bitterness spilled over into the House. Chartered buses brought hundreds of "Stoppies" to the Capitol where they filled the halls. They dressed in red, many wearing aprons in the shape of a stop sign, and the pro-ERA lobbyists, fewer in number, adopted green as their identifying color. A great many young girls and baby strollers added to the props employed by both sides.

Phyllis Schafley brought her traveling anti-ERA revival to the Capitol steps, and for several days prior to her visit, there were persistent rumors that she would be joined by a General Authority of the Church to denounce the ERA publicly in Florida. No General Authority ever arrived.

A large part of the crowd was composed of familiar faces from two wards in Tallahassee and from other units in the Tallahassee Florida Stake. They came down to the Speaker's suite in little clusters but he was able to schedule only a few of them. Some of them, spilling over into my office, would smile and make small talk, hardly mentioning the ERA. The few who did try to lobby were so ill-informed that it was obvious they had done no serious study on the issues and were simply mouthing platitudes. Hardly any knew the text of the Amendment, and some were even surprised when I read it to them. Very few expressed an interest in hearing the other point of view.

Some of my friends began to wonder out loud if I was to be trusted because I was a Mormon, if my integrity were solid in the face of "absentee control" from Salt Lake City. It was the first time I had ever had my principles questioned because of my religion. It reminded me of the kind of whisper campaign John Kennedy suffered when it was suggested that the Pope would really run the United States.

Vote by vote the margin of victory in the Senate slipped away. The Senators who switched from yes or uncommitted positions to a no vote were less influenced by the "stoppies" than they were by the high-pressure tactics of the Senate leadership who had taken it as a challenge to kill the ERA in a show of strength. From a high of about 22 votes, support ebbed and on April 13, 1977 the ERA lost on a 21-19 vote, killing it for the session.

Heads are cooler now and the ERA has departed the Legislature. Last year's experience demonstrated once again that instead of uniting us, human rights issues have a way of dividing us, as a nation and as a faith. I know now that my fears over official church pressure on those who support the ERA were unfounded. Except for the inescapable excesses and abuses of some local church leaders, which were wrong but committed with good intentions, there has been no apparent action to silence the dissenters.

The whole ERA controversy has, however, left so many unsettling questions in the minds of many faithful Saints that I can only hope the Church will be more sensitive in the future. Perhaps the most obvious is the question of why the ERA rested before us as a major national issue for five years without any indication that such forceful political guidance was coming? If the ERA was evil in 1977, it must certainly have been evil in 1972. Some Saints, like myself, went so far as to write General Authorities for clarification of the many rumors circulating about Church position that did so more than a year before the policy statement was issued. No indication was given that anything was coming. It was pointless to counsel with the Bishop or Branch President because they also had received no official statement either.

The Church, acting locally or nationally, did itself and individual members a great deal of harm by sending members out to lobby without even a minimal effort to inform them on the issues. In Florida, the Saints involved in the ERA controversy had an overwhelming tendency to make false accusations, to generalize, often characterizing ERA supporters in the most vicious terms. It was almost as if they had been instructed that those who supported the ERA were uniformly motivated by evil intent.

Those of us who had first hand experience with the new "Nauvoo Legion" sent forth to our nation's legislatures can only view it as a most unfortunate period in our faith's history. Few friends were won for Mormonism, and a great many were lost.

Ken Driggs
Macon, Georgia

scholarly trappings and imitation issues

Dialogue was born in the 60's, a child of unusually strong talent with all the traits of honest vitality, fresh curiosity, courage to travel uncharted territories and simple faith in the goodness of the search for which children are traditionally noted. The strength of the young journal in promoting the integrity of inquiry and intelligent faith has never been equaled by any other publication in the 150 year history of "Mormonism."

What about *Dialogue* in the '70's? Unfortunately, in my opinion, *Dialogue* isn't cutting it. The vitality that carried the journal to such consistent highs of excellence has waned and become uneven. It has been rumored, by a former contributor, that *Dialogue* has been "baptized" into speaking merely for the official interests of the fraternity of which it reports. If the charge is correct, and the quality and style of many recent

articles indicate that it may be, then *Dialogue* has lost the very genius and purpose for which it was founded.

The early issues solidified a sense of pride in Mormonism and its heritage and tradition that gallons of the more time tested whitewash couldn't begin to match. The whitewashers have never understood the difference between criticism and contempt. While those contemptuous of the Church merely seek to gather information molded with distortion to destroy the Church, the whitewashers gather one-sided self-serving information to justify the traditional interpretation of every last claim. The honest critic strikes an objective balance that could lead to truthful insights. *Dialogue* is not measuring up as it did to the standards I've tried to express. The bottom line is that I fear that if *Dialogue* doesn't speak up soon on the issues of Mormon doctrine, ethics, history and society that need addressing, it will die from the lack of support of those who once loved it most.

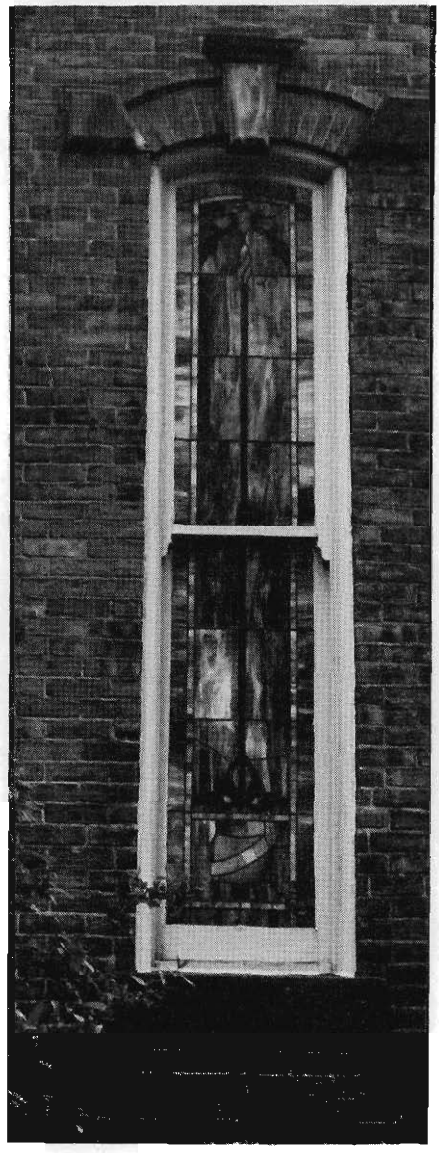
Dialogue, which first tapped the thirst for LDS scholarship was the pacesetter for the excellence of succeeding journals and magazines. It has now fallen victim to the popular manipulation of scholarly trappings which pervades all scholarly journals currently in the Church. When some saw that what a segment of church membership wanted was "scholarship," they proceeded to serve up imitation issues smothered with "scholarship," full of sound and fury signifying nothing! Such is the rut, from my vantage point, that *Dialogue* finds itself in. I hope that this slackening quality does not signal an irreversible dwindling of interest. If the new editor is truly charting an untrammeled course, then word of *Dialogue's* demise, as the cliche goes, is "grossly exaggerated." To those of us whose Mormon heritage is indelible, the prospect for *Dialogue's* contribution to a renaissance in LDS thought is fondly hoped for.

David L. Rowland
Salt Lake City, Utah

mormon letters

On October 7, 1978, the Association for Mormon Letters held its third annual symposium at the Marriott Library on the campus of the University of Utah. Papers dealing with a wide range of topics relating to many aspects of Mormon literature were presented in a morning and afternoon session. During the luncheon meeting, the presidential address was given and awards were presented in recognition of distinguished accomplishments in Mormon fiction, poetry and crtical writing during the period 1975–77. In a more informal evening session, several authors read selections from their poetry and prose in progress.

The morning session began with Maureen Ursenbach Beecher discussing three different autobiographical modes used by Eliza R. Snow and the psychological, social and aesthetic im-



plications of each. Lavina Fielding Anderson analyzed the role that identity crises have played in missionary fiction and drama. Davis Bitton described the career of Claude T. Barnes, a little-known Utah naturalist with limited but nonetheless interesting poetic gifts. Eugene England provided a commentary on the three papers and insight into some of the issues that remain to be explored in relation to the topics considered. During the afternoon session, William Wilson commented on the uses of folklore in *The Giant Joshua*, and Richard Cracroft examined the comic elements in Samuel Taylor's *Heaven Knows Why*. The afternoon session concluded with Stephen Tanner calling for a renewed interest in moral approaches to literary criticism and Levi S. Peterson furnishing the final commentary.

New to this year's symposium was the awarding of prizes to recognize especially important and accomplished contributions to the field of Mormon letters. The prize for fiction was shared by Douglas H. Thayer and Donald R. Marshall. The award to Professor Thayer was given in specific recognition of the short stories "Indian Hills" and "Zarahemla," both contained in *Under Cottonwoods and Other Stories* (Provo: Frankson Press, 1977) and that to Professor Marshall for "The Wheelbarrow" and "The Reunion" from *Frost in the Orchard* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1977). Linda Sillitoe and Arthur Henry King shared the prize for poetry. The prize to Mrs. Sillitoe was for her poems "Letter to a Four-Year-Old Daughter" (*B.Y.U. Studies* 16 [1976], 234) and "The Old Philosopher" (*B.Y.U. Studies* 17 [1977], 222) and that to Professor King for "The Field Behind Holly House" (*B.Y.U. Studies* 16 [1976], 606–7). Clifton Holt Jolley received the prize in critical writing for his essay, "The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith: An Archetypal Study" (*Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 [1976], 329–50).

The evening session of poetry and prose in progress was chaired by Elouise M. Bell and included selections from the recent work of Professor Bell, Dennis Clark, Donald R. Marshall, Linda Sillitoe, and Emma Lou W. Thayne. Examples of the work of Dennis Clark, Linda Sillitoe, and Emma Lou W. Thayne may be had for similar reading groups any place in the world by addressing requests to Linda Sillitoe, The Association for Mormon Letters, 1718 Lake Street, Salt Lake City, Utah 84105. (All other matters concerning the Association, including membership and nominations for future prizes, should be addressed to The Association for Mormon Letters, 1346 South 18th East, Salt Lake City, Utah 84108.)

At the business meeting, Eugene England was elected vice-president of the Association, Levi S. Peterson program chairman, and Candadai Sechachari and Elizabeth Shaw members of the council.

Steven P. Sondrup
Brigham Young University