

To Give the Heart: Some Reflections on DIALOGUE

Lavina Fielding Anderson

While I was on my mission in France, I received number 1, volume 1 of a publication I had never heard of before — a chunky little journal in a bright blue cover called DIALOGUE. It was a gift subscription from my roommate, Dawn Hall. A few months later, our mission president, reading a long list of things we missionaries should not be concerned with, included “jazz” and DIALOGUE, although he obviously meant “rock music” by the first item and wasn’t quite sure what he meant by the second. However, I had already read Leonard Arrington’s article on history and Frances Menlove’s on honesty and had made an informed decision.

Now, twenty years later, Dawn is on the editorial staff, working proofreading around four young children, and I am bidding farewell to a cause, a delight, and a chore that has consumed a major portion of the last five years of my life. Our son, Christian, was two when this project began, and Erin Green is also two, which should make things interesting for Susette for the next few years. Since Erin refuses to be seen without a pencil in her hand, I have no doubt of her future. In later years, she and Katie Maryon, our other DIALOGUE baby, will be able to talk about “growing up with DIALOGUE.” Could anything more graphically measure twenty years than these children who will never be able to remember a time when there was not DIALOGUE? They will live in a richer world for its presence — just as the world will be richer for their’s.

I speak of children and DIALOGUE in the same breath because they are both objects of love, with the terrible power of any loved object to fill our hearts and also to break our hearts. C. S. Lewis points out:

There is no safe investment [in loving]. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must . . . wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglement; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket — safe, dark, motionless, airless — it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. . . . The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell (1960, 169).

DIALOGUE is an entangling alliance, a matter, in Gene England’s phrase, of love. It is a matter which requires “the heart and a willing mind” (D&C 64:34). It represents the impossible balancing act, performed quarterly before your very eyes, of loving the Church and loving the human beings who make up that Church, of following leaders, of forgiving leaders, and of being leaders.

LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON, former co-associate editor of DIALOGUE, is president of Editing, Inc., in Salt Lake City, has a long-standing interest in Mormon history, and teaches Sunbeams in her ward. She and her husband, Paul L. Anderson, are parents of a son, Christian.

Paul reminded young Timothy, “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (1 Tim. 1:7).

The power of *DIALOGUE* is the power of the written word, the power of rational approaches from one rational mind to another, and the canons of scholarly discourse which attempts to persuade, not by the energy of emotionalism, but by the orderly presentation of facts. One of the great courtesies of God is that he waits for us to acknowledge the power of all-powerful truth, thus empowering it by our recognition. There is no other way in which freedom and power may coexist. *DIALOGUE* has existed for twenty years because of the consensus that its power stems from reason and from the honor of scholarship, from the open and dispassionate discussion of issues on which people hold passionate opinions, and from the trust and faith that the best way to deal with painful perplexities is not less information but more, not less discussion but more, not appeals to faith but the faith to continue the dialogue. Jack and Linda, as editors, have been responsible and steadfast guardians of that power. I know of no one who has been less susceptible to the seductions of power and no one who has been wiser in the use of such power.

The sheer information in *DIALOGUE* also represents power — the power of knowledge. The history of totalitarian or authoritarian movements is to coopt or destroy institutions that represent an alternative form of power. Thus, we see the Nazi movement redefining the family, controlling education, presenting an official version of history, and debilitating the churches. I see *DIALOGUE* as making a great contribution to the Church by providing a forum for the presentation of historical facts and interpretations that have frequently differed in significant ways from official interpretations. I think that the essays of Lester Bush and Armand Mauss enabled members of the Church who were uneasy with the policy on refusing blacks the priesthood to focus those thoughts and feelings. I see the same process occurring with the policies of the Church that insist on the subordination and submission of women. *DIALOGUE* also provides records of people who have struggled with hard problems in faith and received answers that don't always fit into Sunday School manuals. It celebrates other ways of being a family besides “*the family*” mode. *DIALOGUE* provides the power of validating other modes of being, and in so doing, it creates a community of believers within the larger community.

Both a cause and effect of such a community is the power of love, the second gift of God that Paul lists. Lowell Bennion is fond of pointing out that God is a rational being who is pleased by the worship of rational beings. *DIALOGUE* represents the tangled loves of every human heart and mind, deeply engaged in a pursuit that honors both the individual and the institution. One of the discoveries of the long-awaited *DIALOGUE* survey is that *DIALOGUE* readers are perhaps more than twice as likely to be active as the average member of the Church. They take their intelligence into their Church callings, and they bring their commitments to the Church to the pages of the quarterly. Such a situation spells inevitable conflicts and pain. I am sorry for the pain, but I would be sorrier for the absence of the conflict. Bill Evans of the Church's Public Communications Department once told me that the Church

suffers as much from the activities of its uncritical lovers as it does from those of its unloving critics, and that what it needs more of is loving critics. I think that DIALOGUE fosters such love.

I could wish for the Church the fierce possessiveness of lovers who cannot be alienated from it — “Set me as a seal upon thine heart . . . for love is strong as death; many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it” (S. of S. 8:6–7) — but who refuse to say “all is well in Zion; yea, Zion prospereth, all is well” but instead are “grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:6) and refuse to be comforted. For the uncritical lovers, in my opinion, are those who “put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near” (Amos 6:3).

Possessing the third quality which Paul denotes as a gift of God — that of a sound mind — is intimately connected with the first two qualities. No one who is dominated by another can have a sound mind, for the locus of power will always lie outside that person, in the will or whims of another. “The power is in *them*,” the Lord reminded Joseph Smith, speaking of the Saints, “wherein they are agents unto themselves” (D&C 58:28). DIALOGUE people claim that power.

With it, they also claim the pain that comes from being an agent. As members of the Church, we face the need to respond either with honesty or with loyalty in many, many situations. The Church rewards loyalty — as any institution does — and usually asserts that there is no conflict between being honest and being loyal. Our daily lives in our wards and in the larger church teach us differently. And God, who sees all, rewards both honesty and loyalty; but I believe he rewards them best when we recognize those conflicts and do not avoid the pain — the sometimes heartbreaking pain — of those conflicts.

I have talked about the ideal of DIALOGUE, just as we often talk about the ideal lessons and rewards that our children bring to us. The realities of both are frequently confusion, perplexities, being overwhelmed by minutiae and exhausted by never-ending demands. More than one winter night at 4 A.M. has found me sitting on the floor in front of the bathroom heat register — the warmest place in the house — proofreading galleys. I have responded with incredulity to more than one manuscript that I know an author has labored over. I have slaved over more than one manuscript to bring it to a state of perfection, only to have its author ungratefully prefer his or her own version. Each member of the staff could share similar stories. There is no way to acknowledge it, recognize it, and recompense it adequately.

But for me, the great reward of DIALOGUE has been the community of DIALOGUE, twenty years of association with the complexities of people who know virtually all there is to know about some aspect of the Church and who still love it loyally, with people who struggle to be mature and responsible in emotionally charged situations, with people who affirm and celebrate the core values of the gospel and find ways of sharing that joy with others. Tonight we share a literal banquet. My parents, who subscribe to the philosophy, “My kid, right or wrong. Usually wrong,” sent flowers. The RLDS friends here are the embodied dialogue between members of our shared yet different faiths.

In all the elements of our twenty-year-old community, I see the situation described by C. S. Lewis in full fruition:

It is one of the difficult and delightful subtleties of life that we must deeply acknowledge certain things to be serious and yet retain the power and will to treat them often as lightly as a game.

. . . Christ, who said to the disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," can truly say to every group of Christian friends, "You have not chosen one another but I have chosen you for one another." The Friendship is not a reward for our discrimination and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all the others. . . . They are, like all beauties, derived from Him, and then, in a good Friendship, increased by Him through the Friendship itself, so that it is His instrument for creating as well as for revealing. At this feast it is He who has spread the board and it is He who has chosen the guests. It is He, we may dare hope, who sometimes does, and always should, preside (1960, 126-27).

I have experienced that spirit many, many times over the past five and a half years. And *that* has been the ultimate reward.

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A Tribute to DIALOGUE

Levi S. Peterson

I could justly praise DIALOGUE for many qualities. But for the sake of brevity I will concentrate upon a single overriding virtue. DIALOGUE makes my religion interesting.

When I was a boy, I believed that sacrament meeting was nothing less than a heinous test of patience. I believed that those who presided and prayed and preached had conspired to achieve a perfect vacuity. In those unhappy days when a single ward occupied the meetinghouse in my hometown, we attended priesthood meeting and Sunday school in the morning and returned after a noon meal for a sacrament meeting that often went on for two and a half or three hours. I could not escape because my mother was as diligent as she was zealous. Tethered to a narrow portion of a hard oak bench, I slumped, I listed, I writhed, I read hymns, I let my eyes follow moths and wasps in their dizzy spirals about the chapel, I counted the holes in the ceiling tile. In the meantime my mother slept. I never knew her to stay awake for more than the first ten minutes of any meeting. She owed her gift for sleep partly to the late hours she kept in nurturing a large family and partly — I am convinced — to an ancestral propensity. It was my regular duty to awaken my mother

LEVI S. PETERSON is a professor of English at Weber State College. He is the author of *The Canyons of Grace*, a collection of short stories, and *The Backslider*, a novel.