

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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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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

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momentarily so that she could partake of the sacrament. I do not remember resenting her ability to sleep; rather I envied and attempted to emulate it. I closed my eyes tight, I imposed a cataleptic rigidity upon my spine and limbs, I strenuously willed myself asleep. Nothing availed. There was no anesthetic, no merciful lapse into oblivion, no release from the tedium of ponderous hours.

I have found sacrament meeting scarcely more tolerable as an adult than I found it as a child. I have come to enjoy a rousing hymn and a sincere prayer, particularly if they are short, but try as I will I can't manage more than a desperate resignation before the prospect of a sermon. Mormon preaching strikes me as deficient in content, design, and delivery. To a considerable degree Mormonism remains a folk religion. Its most current ideas — even those preached by the Brethren in General Conference — seem slanted toward a recessive juvenile mentality. I think I disliked sermons as a child not because they went over my head but because they went beneath it. Even at six or seven or eight I was already weary of the constant iteration of concepts I had satisfactorily grasped in my earliest Sunday school and primary lessons. The design of the typical sermon is inherently stultifying, depending upon a simple rhetoric of scriptural citation. Preachers assert a truth, leaf through the Bible or Book of Mormon, and read an illustrative passage, repeating the procedure until their designated time has elapsed. Furthermore, the Mormon democracy, the ordinary church members who in absence of a professional clergy preside and preach, bring mediocre talents to the delivery of their sermons. Monotone reigns in Mormon preaching. Church members are suspicious of eloquence, as if they believe sincerity resides only in a humdrum voice and a commonplace vocabulary.

The foregoing sentiments help explain, if not excuse, the fact that for the first couple of decades of my adulthood I fell away from regular church attendance. I attended sacrament meeting about twice a year — just often enough to assure myself that nothing new had come on the Mormon scene. Perhaps I should attribute my return to regular attendance to a change in metabolism. Not long after I turned forty I discovered that I could sleep in church. I had come into my inheritance; my maternal genes had asserted themselves. At last I could tolerate Mormon preaching.

I now attend sacrament meeting regularly, where I am a studied, inveterate sleeper. I sleep hard. I sleep voraciously. I sleep vindictively. Out of respect for the sacrament I resist sleep until I have partaken of the bread and water. The moment the deacon bearing the water moves from my pew to the next, I assume a carefully devised position. I plant my feet with toes turned outward, and I twine my arms and hook my thumbs in my belt. This maneuver keeps me from lolling sideways onto my neighbor while I am unconscious. Next I bow my head, pressing my chin upon my breast. This keeps my mouth closed and muffles the distracting snorting and snuffling common to sleepers. Then I close my eyes and give myself over to slumber. Some forty or fifty minutes later I awaken to the sounds of the closing hymn, much edified and enormously refreshed. No longer do I resent the fact that no one has reported hearing a new idea in a Mormon sermon since the death of Brigham Young.

I can see from my new vantage that the soporific nature of Mormon preaching reduces stress and otherwise promotes health.

My sleeping does not go unnoticed by my fellow ward members. One sister frequently asks me whether I have rested well. Another asks why I waste my time since I could sleep as well at home. I reply that surely the Lord would prefer a little of my attention to none at all. Besides, I ask my critics, in what other environment could I sleep with greater security? As I doze comfortably among the most decent and moral people in the world, I know I will be neither robbed nor murdered. I have even attempted to reactivate a couple whom I visit as a home teacher by assuring them that sacrament meeting isn't half bad if one can get off to sleep before the preaching starts. So far this inactive couple remains unimpressed by my argument.

Of course I exaggerate in saying that I have resumed attendance because of a change in my metabolism. Actually, the foremost influence upon my decision to return to a fuller activity was my perception that not all Mormons take their religion simplistically. I resolved to return to activity as a consequence of discovering that the Church has a contingent of members with an interest in ideas, a love for the arts, and a curiosity about the global civilization which modern humanity has evolved. The contingent of thoughtful and cultivated members is amorphous, reticent, and unappreciated; nonetheless it persists. There was no merit in my discovery of this community of Mormon intellectuals; it was there long before I noticed it. But having at last discovered it, I was astonished and encouraged by a splendid correlative fact: Christianity does not have to be boring.

The community of Mormon intellectuals has evolved various media of expression, all of them important and, indeed, indispensable. Among these media *DIALOGUE* looms. In longevity, quality, and reputation it is preeminent. It was *DIALOGUE* which first taught me that a faithful Mormon can lead a life of the mind. *DIALOGUE* publishes many genres — essays, articles, monographs, reviews, testimonies, stories, poems, photographs, prints, and sermons. (Incredibly, I often find its sermons readable.) *DIALOGUE* is attractive in design, format, and print. It is thoughtful and scholarly in content. Its materials are sifted and sorted by conscientious referees. It is not afraid of wit, irony, and dissent. In its pages Mormonism becomes stimulating, challenging, and vital.

The greatest tribute I can pay is this: I can read *DIALOGUE* without falling asleep.