

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Writing Something That Matters

Since returning from our recent mission to Poland, I have found it increasingly difficult to feel much respect for writers, historians, self-styled intellectuals, critics—and the journals they publish in—who arrogate to themselves the right to comment on the Church, its leaders, members, doctrines, history, etc., from a purely naturalistic viewpoint or from the only slightly veiled perspectives of faithlessness, ignorance, or lack of real understanding of the doctrines and practices of the Church. This includes those who have been excommunicated, those who are “lapsed,” and those whose apparent greatest desire is to gain the applause and honor of other worldly intellectuals and secular fame.

All lack the absolute prerequisites for saying something true, wise, or significant: faith in God and Jesus Christ, a living testimony of the gospel and the Restoration, real experience in responsible Church callings and the living companionship of the Holy Ghost. Without these, in my opinion, no one will ever write anything about the Church that matters. No wonder Church leaders pay so little attention to these folk. They know only too well that one humble person of faith trying to help build the kingdom is worth a dozen of more critical, know-it-all intellectuals.

At my age, it seems an incredible waste of time to read much of the current Mormon intellectual drivel that, though sometimes clever and well-written—intellectuals usually prefer style to substance—and maybe even well-documented, does not pass the crucial tests of truthfulness, spirituality, tone, and meaningfulness. Or it is filled with con-

temporary intellectual fads, social science paradigms, assumptions of political and academic correctness, and arrogant intellectual pride by those who take themselves and their ideas very seriously together with a lack of any form of meekness and humility—still and always the hallmarks of real Christian scholars.

In my view, all of these spiritual virtues are essential for saying anything that is significant or that matters about any part of the Church and its members. Many years ago, long before Church leaders discouraged attendance at such gatherings as Sunstone, I had quit going for a simple reason: I rarely felt a good spirit there. I believe that much of what was done and said there was designed to weaken faith and did not bring out the best in me or any of us. Sessions were often beehives of contention, posturing, and self-importance.

In my judgment, the editors of *DIALOGUE*, and of all journals that publish something about Latter-day Saints, should ask themselves what the intentions—as best they can be determined—are of the author in writing this article. Is it, for example, a case of a spiritual pygmy sitting in judgment on a spiritual giant? Is it a case of extraordinary intellectual or spiritual immaturity? The distinguished Yale historian of Christianity Roland Bainton once told me that no one should try to write any meaningful history before the age of forty because he or she hadn't lived long enough to know anything. Is it an example of someone writing about the Church who has never been entrusted with significant responsibility where he or she had to fully trust in

the Lord? Or, is it a case of someone trying to cover his personal sins, by making an effort to tear down someone else and thereby make himself feel important? Why do DIALOGUE and similar journals publish these kinds of articles? It would appear that these kinds of authors' intentions are transparent.

Finally, I marvel that somehow we haven't realized that no one is objective, especially when writing about the Church. For anyone to claim objectivity is pure nonsense or self-delusion. Moreover, those writing from the outside—whether nonmembers or former members—are not only not objective, fairer, or more unbiased, as they claim, than those of us who are faithful members; they are, if anything, more biased and less understanding, especially of the motivations of people of faith, because they are faithless and worldly themselves. The world of faith is a world they know nothing about. I believe they are ignorant of the fact that they are ignorant.

Writers like Jan Shippo, Robert Remini, Will Bagley, Jon Krakauer, Michael Quinn, et al. delude themselves if they think that they understand Latter-day Saints when, in fact, they have very little of any significance to tell anyone about the Church because, without the Holy Ghost and a living testimony, there is little they understand about it, about us and why we do what we do. Some of them haven't even a clue, and yet we in our journals continue to take them seriously. Most do not believe, for example, that the Lord plays a role in human history generally and especially in the direction of his church. What, then, do they really have to tell us that makes any difference?

As I see it, the only Latter-day Saint history that has much worth is what Richard L. Bushman has called "Faith-

ful History" because only the faithful can write it. The unique nature of the Church requires it. This does not mean that it should not be critical history, but we should be very careful about whom and on what we sit in judgment and ask whether we are qualified and have been called to do it. And we should be wary of anyone who thinks to write about the Church who lacks any kind of spiritual qualification. We should write our history from the standpoint of respect, not adoration, humility not arrogance or sycophancy, observing all the canons of real scholarship including accuracy, honesty, self-awareness—making every effort to write what is true and meaningful.

Douglas F. Tobler
 Lindon, Utah

Good Wishes to the New Staff

As longtime subscribers, we are encouraged that DIALOGUE is continuing; and we send our good wishes to the new team of editors. We've found much to appreciate in the journal over these thirty-five years—from artwork on covers to researched articles, personal essays, and poetry, as well as many of the letters to the editor!

We also value the thoughtful attention to quality, both in content and appearance. Of recent features, we especially appreciated the interview with Professor Duane E. Jeffery in the Winter 2002 issue, a good follow-up to republishing his early essay in the thirty-fifth anniversary issue.

We hope hefty sections of poetry and book reviews will continue to be included!

Jerry and Dixie Partridge
 Richland, Washington

In Praise of Editorial Teams

This is a letter of appreciation to Rebecca and Neal Chandler, the immediate past editors of *DIALOGUE*. I would guess that it has been difficult to manage the enterprise so far from a critical mass of Mormon intellectuals and scholars (not to say copy editors, illustrators, etc.), and yet the Chandlers have produced a uniformly high quality of issues, many of them with landmark articles and essays.

Since I have some acquaintance with the personal and professional costs of editing the journal, I would venture that the Chandlers have experienced their share of conflicts, disappointments, and criticism. Undoubtedly, some of these pressures have affected their family life, their professional life, and their experience in their own ward and stake. Whatever the costs have been to them, the benefits of their editorship for those of us who read the journal have been enormous. Thank you, Rebecca and Neal—and all your able co-laborers in the *DIALOGUE* vineyard.

I also appreciate those responsible for choosing the new editorial team and look forward to the issues they will produce. As editor (1971-76), I was blessed to have a wonderful executive committee, editorial board, and staff. I am sure each editor/editorial team feels the same about their co-workers. As I have gone back and reviewed the issues from the beginning, I have been impressed that each editorial team has left its mark, and each has given us something valuable and unique. Each has also given us deeper insight into our history; greater understanding of the challenges of harmonizing faith and reason; more expansive views of what it means to be Latter-day Saints in a complex political, social, and reli-

gious world; and new ways in which the restored gospel of Jesus Christ can be lived successfully in the delicate balance between individual spirituality and institutional religion. In addition, each editorial team has provided readers with an amazing array of fictional, poetic, scholarly, humorous, and personal voices. These voices have spoken to me in ways that have challenged my thinking, broadened my horizons, challenged my axioms, and, most important of all, deepened my heart. In short, *DIALOGUE* has been a blessing in my life, making me a better Latter-day Saint and a better Christian.

To all those of you who have labored over the years to publish this important journal, I offer my deepest appreciation. And to the new editorial team taking over the helm, I wish you all success in continuing this great tradition of bringing enlightened dialogue to those of us for whom it represents essential intellectual, artistic, and spiritual nourishment.

Robert Rees
Brookdale, California

CORRECTION: The title of Karen Marguerite Moloney's essay, "Saints for All Seasons: Lavina Fielding Anderson and Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*," in *DIALOGUE* 36 (Fall 2003), was printed incorrectly as "Saints for All Seasons: Lavina Fielding Anderson and Bernard Shaw's *Joan of Arc*." The essay's first sentence and second footnote should also have been set off as an editor's note. The first sentence should read: "Shortly after her excommunication from the LDS Church in 1993, Lavina Fielding Anderson was interviewed by Rod Decker live in Salt Lake City for the television program *Take Two*."