

Personal Reflections on the Founding of *Dialogue*

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The idea of starting a Mormon publication had certainly occurred to many before the appearance of *Dialogue*. It first surfaced in my mind in the 1950s. Richard O. Cowan was doing graduate work in history at Stanford where I was an undergraduate, and we often talked about Mormon history and theology and the wealth of material there was for a journal of Mormon history. We were part of a group of LDS students who would drive back to Utah for conference, holidays, or long weekends. As we drove through the night across Nevada, long conversations evolved that remain in my mind as some of the most stimulating of my college days.

During my mission in France, I was fortunate to have Wesley Johnson as a senior companion in Valence. It was near the end of his mission and early in mine, but we found a commonality that developed into a life-long friendship. After our missions, we were both at Stanford for a period. When I had returned to Utah to complete my architectural studies, I often returned to the Bay Area to visit friends, like Wes, who was then teaching at Stanford, and Frances Menlove whose husband was in graduate school there. On those visits Wes and I often talked about the potential of a Mormon journal.

My memory is that I mentioned to Frances that Wes and I had been exploring the idea of a journal of Mormon history. She said Gene England and Joe Jeppson (whom neither Wes nor I really knew) were talking about a similar idea and suggested we should get together. (Wes recalls that Diane Monson played the role of intermediary, so we clearly remember this episode differently.) Gene and Joe were more focused on the theological and social areas a journal might explore while Wes and I had perhaps focused more on history. When we met, we all agreed that

there was an overlap in those fields and that each of us was interested in exploring all aspects of Mormon culture, history, and intellectual life. We all believed that the resources for such a journal lay within the Mormon intellectual community—on various campuses and elsewhere across the United States—a community for which no forum or outlet existed within the Church. Though *BYU Studies* had published many interesting papers, many felt it was not entirely free to explore issues without the official filter.

“Dialogue” was one of the catch words of the '60s, but we liked the implications of the name. It turned out there was another publication with that name, so the subtitle “A Journal of Mormon Thought” was important, not only to help define and market the publication but to avoid trademark infringement of such a popular term.

At that time I had no experience in publishing but, like Wes, had been fascinated by how journals were put together. An early influence had been *Perspectives USA*, a quarterly of the 1950s that promoted American arts and literature. And we were both familiar with a range of American and French journals.

With a background in architecture, I had had a fair exposure to graphic design and type styles. Wes was fascinated by calligraphy and knew typography well. Though the 1960s were a period of new, clean, contemporary, sans-serif type faces, we agreed that we wanted to use a serif type and do everything possible to give the journal a solid, established appearance. The format, paper color—everything was geared to create the sense that this was a serious endeavor.

The initial tone of the publication was really set, I think, by the announcement mailer I designed. We sent it out to a huge mailing list compiled from sources across the Church. In it, the engraving of the two men “dialoging” under a tree made their debut. That image and several others came from old Deseret Alphabet books.

The selection of art work, photos, cover design, and composition of pages were my responsibility for the first few issues. It didn't take long for me to realize that the journal deserved more professional design support. Ed Maryon at the University of Utah Art Department was generous with his ideas and assistance and steered me to other artists. We were generously offered the work of artists, photographers, and graphic designers throughout the Church.

In the mid-1960s, hot topics included the Church's demolition of

historic buildings and its position on blacks and the priesthood. To illustrate articles on those issues, I was fortunate to find excellent work by local photographers, from Reuters News Agency, and the great photographers' cooperative, Magnum.

Mailing took a big effort from a team of volunteers who had to be recruited for each irregularly produced issue. Those issues were hand-stuffed in a paper envelope, sealed, and labeled—all on someone's dining room table or a borrowed conference room. Since the publication function was clearly distinct from the editorial function, the distance between Salt Lake and Stanford was rarely a problem. But in those days before FedEx, fax, and email, there were plenty of challenges.

At the time of *Dialogue's* founding, I was doing my architectural apprenticeship in Utah. Getting the journal out required the empathy of the architects where I worked, as I often had to be at the printer's on short notice to deal with printing crises or to check the initial run of the issue. We first sought printing bids from a variety of sources, including Stanford University Press, but pricing was more competitive in Utah. Our first issues were done by Quality Press in Salt Lake City. Those issues were run with handset type, so all of the art and photos had to be turned into metal. Then Publishers Press/Bookcraft, an LDS publishing house less official than Deseret Book, solicited us. The price was competitive, and the process was lithograph, which allowed greater flexibility for changes and higher quality of photo and art reproduction. Still, it resulted in a less "scholarly" page in my mind: There is a particular quality to a printed page done with hot-metal type that I value. After working with Publishers for Volume 2, we happily returned to Quality Press.

Considering that none of us had created a publication before and that nothing like it existed in Mormon society, it now seems amazing that it moved so quickly and smoothly from our early discussions to the first issue. The response was both gratifying and disappointing. We quickly climbed to 5,000 subscribers, which was not insignificant. But in a church that then numbered around two million, the potential seemed much greater. We were constantly looking for opportunities to reach that market. The University of Utah *Chronicle* was one we hit whenever there was a special article or issue that seemed likely to grab the attention of that faculty/student group. We advertised a number of times in the Utah Symphony program—sometimes taking out full page or back cover ads. We did some advertising in the *Salt Lake Tribune*, but the ads were easily lost and

the potential readership was less concentrated. I spoke to fireside groups along the Wasatch Front, and Wes, Gene, Ed Geary, Richard Bushman, and others spoke to groups across the country. Ultimately, though, it was word of mouth within the Church and academic community that spread the readership.

A real effort was made to advertise in the *Improvement Era*. Most Mormon families subscribed to the *Era*, and it was the one publication Mormons all over the English-speaking world received in the 1960s. In those days it took advertisements for all kinds of products and services and often for books or publications. We were excluded. Hugh B. Brown, then a counselor in David O. McKay's First Presidency, was openly supportive of *Dialogue*; and when I met with him on the idea of advertising in the *Era*, he said he would do what he could. But he warned me that many of "the brethren" were concerned about the publication. When I met with Apostle Richard L. Evans, under whose direction the *Era* fell, it was clear *Dialogue* would not be given access to that broad Church readership.

Warnings about being involved with *Dialogue*, or an independent publication that dealt with Mormon life, emerged immediately. We were naive, but that official stance was a surprise to us. The idea of *Dialogue* seemed such a natural outgrowth of our understanding and testimony of Mormonism. I'll never forget being interrupted at Sunday dinner with my parents by a phone call from Wes on some urgent matter regarding an issue we were trying to get out. When I returned to the dinner table, my father—perhaps partly in annoyance at dinner having been interrupted—said something like, "No good will come of this venture!" Yet as soon as *Dialogue* was being distributed and read, and he saw the issues, he was very proud and always pointed out to people that his son was an editor of *Dialogue*. Since the publication office was my parents' basement and, at times, part of an empty office my father had, I would say they gave it great support.

One of the most satisfying aspects of working with the journal was the letters—and having people come up to me personally—expressing how gratifying it was to know there were others in the Church "who think as I do." And I believe it did sustain many good members of the Church. The support we received from such a range of exceptional people in the Church and the unqualified encouragement from Leonard J. Arrington, Lowell Bennion, Hugh B. Brown, and others of leadership and prominence helped carry us past the censorship and resistance we also encoun-

tered. Everyone who put so much effort in the creation of *Dialogue* did so as a natural expression of their faith. And for many, that experience clearly confirmed that faith. Still, for those like myself with emerging doubts about the gerontocracy and the growing strictures on intellectual and personal freedom, participation in *Dialogue*'s creation couldn't make enough of a difference to sustain my commitment to institutional Mormonism.

Did my *Dialogue* experience change my relationship with or views about the Church? Was my father right in his prediction? I think rather that it confirmed and clarified my understanding of the Church. Though I now consider myself an "ethnic" Mormon, my *Dialogue* experience was only one of the last phases of an evolution that I trace back through my college and mission experiences. My association with *Dialogue* was a positive, often exhilarating, and satisfying part of my life and personal growth. I think all of us involved at the beginning were doing something we had dreamed of and which we felt was a service to the LDS community and an expression of our faith. It was certainly a wonderful outlet for the idealism and energy of a young man in his early thirties.