

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### *Remembering Dialogue*

I cannot remember exactly when I first tapped into the *Dialogue* phenomenon, but it was early on. I can remember sitting in a meeting room during the time of LDS general conference in the 1960s when Eugene England was speaking about this new publication. What he had to say resonated with me, and I subscribed immediately.

At the time I was a young military officer stationed on the East Coast or, as it was called then, the mission field. My wife and I were members of a small branch; and while life was full with Church callings and the demands of a growing family, it lacked the spiritual and intellectual stimulation I had enjoyed as a student at BYU. *Dialogue* helped fill that void.

The most influential article I read as a new subscriber, and perhaps still the most influential article for the past forty years, was Richard Poll's, "What the Church Means to People Like Me" (2, no. 4 [Winter 1967]: 107-17). I had in my college days developed a passion for Church history, which is both inspiring and messy. There are few topics more exciting and inspiring than the story of the Mormon pioneers, but embedded in the same story are sometimes unsettling issues, such as the Mountain Meadows Massacre, polygamy, or blood atonement, just to name a few.

I grew to suspect that many aspects of the gospel were not as straightforward as I had gathered from my years growing up in Mormon Utah. But liv-

ing far away from the center stakes of Zion, I found few ways to work through issues and doubts. I found myself envious of those in my branches and wards who seemed so sure of everything and never doubted. The "Iron Rod/Liahona" construct proposed by Brother Poll provided me with the perspective I needed to mature more gracefully in the Church. Over the years, various articles in *Dialogue* addressed such subjects in a way that I could see them in a clearer light. For me, when *Dialogue* tackled ticklish subjects, it served to dispel doubt, not cause it.

Over the last forty years I have gone on to hold multiple Church callings. My testimony has flourished and deepened. And for all those years, I have continued to enjoy *Dialogue* articles. They have enriched my life immeasurably. I own and have read every issue published. They are all lined up on my bookshelf and enjoy an honored place in our home and in my heart. It has been a great journey. I salute all the authors and editors who have labored so hard over the years to keep this vibrant and worthwhile publication going. It certainly has made a difference in my life.

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### *Thoughts on Dialogue*

My father-in-law introduced me to *Dialogue*, sort of. Actually, he gave me a copy of *A Thoughtful Faith*, edited by

Philip L. Barlow (Centerville, Utah: Canon Press, 1986). Early in our relationship, my father-in-law recognized that I was a little different than your average woven-into-the-quilt Mormon but maybe not so different from himself. As I read the liner notes for the book, I noted that a number of the essays had been originally published in *Dialogue*. It wasn't long afterward that I was buying *Dialogue* off the shelf where and when I could find it and eventually taking out and renewing my own subscription.

Since the time my father-in-law gave me *A Thoughtful Faith*, I have recommended and lent the book out several times. I have lent and given out issues of *Dialogue* as many times. In fact, it is typically to the same people that I offer both. However, if you were to compare the number of times I have given out and recommended *A Thoughtful Faith* and *Dialogue* to the number of years I have been in the Church, you would be somewhat underwhelmed.

But herein is my point: *Dialogue* is not for everyone. It is for people who (dare I say?) are not afraid to be thoughtful about their faith. Unfortunately, I have found that a lot of people *are* afraid to be thoughtful. Even more unfortunately, I have found that those same people often become (1) hopelessly neurotic, (2) racked with guilt, (3) nonmembers, (4) all of the above.

So what has *Dialogue* meant to me over the years? *Dialogue* has given me a sense of community, a sense that I'm not the only one out there. *Dialogue* is the member I wish were in my ward. To be fair, sometimes people who emulate the spirit of *Dialogue* have been in my ward. But when I'm part of those wards

in which such people do not exist, *Dialogue* has taken on paramount importance.

Of course, this doesn't mean that I hold on to every word printed in the journal. There are times that *Dialogue* and I have disagreements, times when I roll my eyes in exasperation and flip on to the next article, essay, or poem. But I think that is what a real dialogue is supposed to be like—a balance of agreements and disagreements. Too many agreements become a panegyric; too many disagreements become an argument. In the end, it's not the dialogue but the discourse that matters.

What I love most about *Dialogue* are the personal essays, the short fiction, and the poems. That's where the voices reside. That's where I feel the breath of life, where I find community. A confession: one of my favorite sections in the journal is the bios. Reading the bios is like having a look through someone's refrigerator. I look for similarities and differences between their lives and my own. Finding someone with a similar background is like discovering a half-finished jar of English mustard in their fridge and realizing I'm not alone in my taste for potentially lethal condiments. (This should take care of being invited to dinners for a while—or at least being left alone in kitchens.)

So that's about it. What *Dialogue* means to me: Being mentally healthy, being part of a community, poking through refrigerators.

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