

Letters

A Continuing Dialogue

I have just finished reading the entire current issue (Spring 2009) and realized anew why I appreciate *Dialogue* so much. The volume is filled with many good things—interesting letters, stimulating articles, cogent and penetrating commentary, engaging fiction, beautiful and provocative poetry, informed reviews, an insightful personal essay, and even an inspiring sermon. That's a plentiful cornucopia of Mormon thought and expression!

I particularly appreciate the fact that *Dialogue* creates the space for *dialogue*—for thinking and imagining, for thoughtful reflection, for contemplation, for new insight. I was struck, for example, with the connection between Todd M. Compton's excellent and informative article on Jacob Hamblin (1–29) with its revelation of Mormon anti-Indian practices and policies and what we learn from the various perspectives and reviews on *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* about how Mormons regarded Native peoples (105–38, 207–26). I am sure I was not the only one struck by the parallel between Mormon treatment of the Goshute Indians around Tooele—e.g., with orders “to take another company of men, go after the Indians, to shoot [i.e., kill] all we found” (17)—with the Mormons scapegoating the Piute Indians for the massacre at Mountain Meadows.

Another correspondence be-

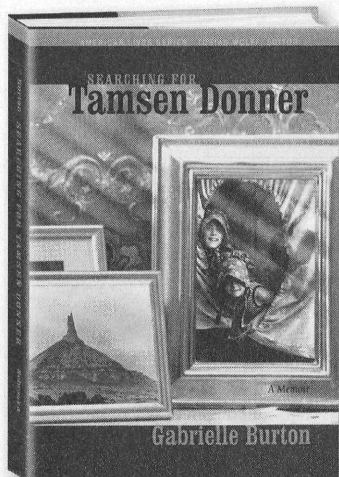
tween Mountain Meadows and contemporary Mormon life is seen in Michael Fillerup's short story, “In a Better Country” (153–207). The murderous vengeance the protagonist seeks to exact for the death of his missionary son is of a piece with the vengeance enacted by Mormon priesthood holders on the killing fields outside Cedar City on that dark September morning.

Regarding Mountain Meadows, I particularly appreciated Philip L. Barlow's deep understanding of how we—Church leaders and ordinary members—are only one to two degrees of separation from our more savage natures. The recent revelation that Mormon attorneys were complicit in approving the torture of prisoners captured in the “War on Terror” confirms Barlow's contention that “we humans, including LDS humans, who ordinarily strive for goodness, are capable of evil. We are, under severe duress, capable of demonizing and even destroying innocent others” (119).

Barlow does not allow us to distance ourselves from the tragedy at Mountain Meadows. He summarizes the process that leads “normal” human beings to become so emotionally caught up in countering some real or imagined enemy that it creates a “recipe that can lead to the distortion of our ordinary moral sensibilities” (119). For some of us, the rhetoric and tactics used

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by some Mormons during the recent Proposition 8 campaign in California validate Barlow's conclusion. It is sobering that Mormons were so willing to distribute material that was false, misleading, and manipulative in what they saw as a grave moral cause. Barlow reminds us that the surrender of individual conscience to authority exacts a price both for individuals and for the Church (122–23).

Finally, I was struck by the relationship between Nathan Florence's beautiful cover of a man and woman in deep, intimate conversation and the cover of the very first issue of *Dialogue* with its engraving of two people conversing under a tree. Florence's painting captures the moment when the woman, hands turned outward, expresses what we imagine is a heart revelation and the man, hands behind his back, listens thoughtfully, also with his heart. It is how I imagine Jesus and Mary walking and conversing on the hills outside Jerusalem. It is for such dialogue that we live.

*Robert A. Rees
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Erratum: *Dialogue* regrets the error in Ross C. "Rocky" Anderson, Letter, "A Call for Compassion," *Dialogue* 42: 2, v–vi. The full sentence should read: "The idea that we are all to fall in line when ordered, even when doing so harms others, is abhorrent, dangerous, and contrary to the most fundamental lessons taught by Jesus and other major religious leaders."