

LETTERS

A Radical Misstatement

I read with great interest M. Gerald Bradford's "The Case for the New Mormon History: Thomas G. Alexander and His Critics" (DIALOGUE, Winter 1988). Bradford makes a number of cogent criticisms of Alexander's essay, a few of which I also made in quite different form during the review process for the article. Bradford certainly is correct that there is a *tendency* for professional historians to disregard or dismiss the truth claims made by religious believers. I do not feel, however, that this is always or necessarily the case. In particular, Bradford and others need to be willing to assess fairly whether those whom they characterize as "New Mormon Historians" do in fact use such reductionistic approaches. On this crucial point, I feel that Bradford is very misleading since he fails accurately to represent the views of many of those whom he criticizes. This can be seen most clearly perhaps in his radical misstatement of my approach toward Joseph Smith's crucial visionary experiences.

My personal approach toward Joseph Smith's visionary experiences is most fully set out in my *Sunstone* essay "First Visions: Personal Observations on Joseph Smith's Religious Experience" (Sept.-Oct. 1983). In it, I emphasize the great power of those experiences and suggest that if properly understood in a full comparative perspective, they "may raise vital issues not simply for Mormons but for all those concerned with the nature and significance of direct religious experience." I further express my deep frustration that neither Mormons nor anti-Mormons seem to have much interest in "reconstructing precisely *what* Joseph

Smith actually experienced." Many believing Latter-day Saints (especially the so-called "traditionalists") appear to be scared of the raw power inherent in Joseph Smith's visionary experiences and find it more comfortable to use the incomplete, canonized 1838 account as a sort of "proof-text" without ever trying to come to grips with the actual experience itself in all its power and inherent mystery.

Although I am not a Mormon, I have attempted and will continue to attempt to grapple with both the power and ambiguities of Joseph Smith's formative personal experiences. I have never denied the possibility that the so-called "First Vision" *may* have involved direct contact with literal beings in some deeper unseen reality with which most of us normally have no direct relationship. On the other hand, as a scholar in the field of religious history who has read accounts of hundreds of similar visionary experiences, I tend (unless I find compelling evidence to the contrary) to try to focus on the naturalistic (including psychological) components which accompanied — and which may or may not "explain" — such phenomena.

My strong personal conviction is that there are dimensions of reality with a "real" existence which far transcend our understanding or comprehension as mere *homo sapiens*. But scholarly parsimony leads me *first* to try to determine the naturalistic components of seemingly extraordinary experiences before I conclude that they are somehow "supernatural" or beyond our own complex earthly reality.

This approach simply is not appealing to "true believer" Mormon traditionalists. They are outraged when serious and sympathetic scholarship reaches *any* conclusion

other than a full and uncritical presentation of the received version of truth, whatever that may happen to be. (For example, consider Louis Midgley's ridiculous assertion that there is "no middle ground" in approaching Latter-day Saint history.) If any real engagement is to be possible between the so-called "traditionalists" and the so-called "new Mormon historians," then the traditionalists will have to be willing to reach out toward the new Mormon historians when we attempt to meet them halfway, as we have done so frequently in the past with little or no response except vituperation against us on their part.

If the traditionalists are not prepared to take seriously the possibility that reality may be more complex than their Sunday School simplifications of it, then they have no valid basis for complaining about supposed "lack of objectivity" of serious scholars who *do* attempt to find out, as much as we possibly can, what really happened. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone! Let not the kettle call the pot black!

Finally, let me correct one minor but annoying error made both by Alexander and by Bradford in quoting Alexander. I am not and never have been a member of the Religious Society of Friends, better-known as Quakers. I made this point explicitly in my essay "A Personal Odyssey: My Encounter with Mormon History" (DIALOGUE, Fall 1983). While I am very sympathetic toward the approach used by many Quakers, my only formal religious affiliation (now inactive) is with the United Methodist Church in which I grew up. I am annoyed that Alexander failed to correct this inaccuracy when I pointed it out in reviewing an early draft of his essay and that Bradford perpetuates the inaccuracy in his quotation of Alexander. Evidently some Latter-day Saints are slow to understand that people may sympathize with some aspects of a religious movement without being members of it.

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Which Middle Ground?

The publication of Marvin S. Hill's "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed" (Fall 1988) indicates continuing interest in assessments of Mormon historiography. In addition, it is especially encouraging that DIALOGUE is willing to publish such fine endeavors as M. Gerald Bradford's "The Case for the New Mormon History: Thomas G. Alexander and His Critics" (Winter 1988). In this most recent "update in the ongoing discussion of Mormon historical writing" (p. 4), Hill defends naturalistic accounts of the Mormon past (pp. 115, 117), which he describes as a "middle ground" (pp. 116, 117) situated between a conservative right and an anti-Mormon left (pp. 115-17, 122, 124-25). Unfortunately, his survey of the literature on "Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins" is, as he admits, inadequate. He fails to assess at least twenty books on this topic published since 1959.

And I find that Hill's treatment of the books he elects to evaluate is flawed. An illustration of this is found in his insistence that conservative writers, on the right of his middle ground mode of writing Mormon history, focus on the question, "Is Mormonism true?" They are interested in "defending the truth of Mormon historical claims" (p. 115) by proclaiming "empirical proofs for Mormon claims" (p. 116). While for those in the middle ground, "Mormonism can be neither proved nor *disproved* by historical means" (p. 125, cf. p. 116). From Hill's perspective, what vitiates conservative Mormon history on his right, as well as anti-Mormon history on his left (p. 117), is the notion that historians believe they can somehow prove or disprove the prophetic claims of Joseph Smith.

The trouble is, Hill makes far too much hang on his loose use of the word "proof," for it is not clear that *any* of the writers he catalogs as conservative assume that it is possible, to cite his example, "to finally establish the historicity of the Book of Mormon, or to disprove it" (p. 116). Hill chides Hugh Nibley (pp. 118-19, where

he mentions Nibley's *Abraham in Egypt* [1981]) for "failing to meet his own essential criteria for proof" (p. 119), but he seems unfamiliar with what Nibley has actually written on the question of whether it is possible to "prove" the Book of Mormon. Nibley has set forth his position on this issue as follows: "For the past twenty years we have repeated in the pages of *The Improvement Era* and elsewhere that nothing is to be gained by trying to prove or disprove the Book of Mormon, but that a great deal can be gained by reading it and discussing its various aspects" (*Since Cumorah* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988] 421; see also his handling of the issue under the heading "Forever Tentative . . .," p. 213).

In addition, Hill's characterization of those he stigmatizes as "far right" critics does not adequately describe their position. His sketchy paraphrase of their arguments, for instance, does not describe my stance, even though in the past I have severely criticized his "middle ground" approach to Mormon origins, nor does he adequately portray or address the issues I have raised (see my "Faith and History" in *To Be Learned Is Good, If . . .*, edited by Robert Millet [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987], pp. 219-26).

Hill concludes his meager survey of the literature on Mormon origins by attacking certain "critics" on the "far right" of his middle ground position for being relativists whose approach amounts to a dangerous nihilism about the past (pp. 117, 124-25). It is interesting to note that Thomas G. Alexander earlier claimed that those he labels "New Mormon Historians" are thoroughgoing relativists because of a devotion to historicism ("Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian's Perspective," *DIALOGUE*, Fall 1986, pp. 31, 42). Such a radical relativism presumably avoids the positivist contamination (pp. 37, 39, 41) which David E. Bohn saw at work in some Mormon history ("No Higher Ground," *Sunstone*, May-June 1983, pp. 26-32).

Ironically, it appears that both Hill and I are troubled by relativism about the past

precisely because it may tend toward a nihilism that would virtually dissolve crucial Mormon historical claims (p. 125) and thereby radically transmogrify the content of faith. The relativism found in historicism may turn out to challenge faith more profoundly than positivism precisely because it wears a more tolerant mask.

On the other hand, I tend to agree with Alexander (1986, 39) that objectivity in the sense of detachment, especially from fundamental beliefs of some sort, is both undesirable and ultimately impossible — in opposition to the position now apparently advanced by Hill (p. 125). But I agree with Hill (pp. 115-16), rather than Alexander, that it is confusing to talk about a "new Mormon history," for neither the issues nor the positions have changed very much in twenty or more years. (Incidentally, after denying that there is a "new Mormon history," Hill then proceeds to defend *it* against criticism from a "far right" but neglects to explain why it is necessary to defend something that does not exist.) On the other hand, Alexander is wise in discovering, even if somewhat belatedly, that there are a few secularists who are busy doing Mormon history in naturalistic terms (pp. 45-46), and in admitting that they are more or less enthralled by elements of positivism (p. 39). So it seems that I have my own middle-ground position somewhere between Alexander and Hill, who may disagree with each other at least as much as either disagrees with me. I admit, however, that I am uncertain how to situate these matters, or even why they should be situated, on such a simplistic left-center-right spectrum. I loathe such categorizing of views, whether political or otherwise.

It seems that the debate over the proper manner of dealing with Mormon origins is not over, partly because it is still unclear *what* is being debated. And this is true in spite of the fact that a number of responses have appeared in the pages of *DIALOGUE* to those perceived as critics of something loosely called "new Mormon history" (or of "middle ground history"). If

the crucial issue is the propriety of naturalistic explanations, as Hill now claims, then what is needed is an opportunity for the opponents of a secular history done in naturalistic terms, that is of what is sometimes called "Revisionist History," to set forth their views. Revisionist History may seem an overly pejorative label, but I have borrowed it from Richard P. Howard, RLDS Church Historian, one of Hill's few examples of a genuine "middle ground" historian other than Donna Hill and Leonard J. Arrington (see his "Revisionist History and the Document Diggers," Winter 1986, pp. 65-69).

In spite of the claim made by the editors of *DIALOGUE* (Fall 1988, 4), Hill's essay is simply not "careful and dispassionate," nor does it advance the analysis of the crucial issues. I will briefly illustrate some of Hill's carelessness and inaccuracy. He began his essay by attributing to Moses Rischin (whoever he is) the statement that "Mormon history and culture can be studied in human and naturalistic terms — indeed, must be so studied, without thus rejecting the divinity of the Church's origin and work" (p. 115). Rischin was actually quoting from the very first essay in the first issue of *DIALOGUE* — an essay by Leonard Arrington. Alexander made essentially the same mistake in 1986 (p. 25). The editors of *DIALOGUE* had that inaccuracy drawn to their attention. It seems odd that *DIALOGUE* would allow another prominent Mormon historian to again erroneously attribute Arrington's famous statement about the use of naturalistic terms in the doing of Mormon history to Moses Rischin — the author of an obscure one-page essay which carried the title "The New Mormon History." Rischin merely happened to quote one of Arrington's more famous remarks. But even that remark is merely a bald assertion, which Arrington later admitted needed further study (Spring 1966, p. 23 n. 44).

In private communications with *DIALOGUE*, I earlier called attention to Alexander's mistake, since he had begun by quoting Arrington's language with approval

(Fall 1986, p. 25) — though, like Hill, he also incorrectly attributed it to Rischin. Later he attacked Gary Novak and me for having violated "the canons of ordinary academic discourse" (p. 43) because, after accurately quoting the passage from Arrington that he had quoted with approval (p. 25), we implied that some of his explanations could be understood as naturalistic, a position at that point in his apology, which he suddenly staunchly disavowed (pp. 42-44). (In addition, both Alexander [p. 49] and Hill [p. 127] incorrectly cite volume 5 of the *American West* as the reference to Rischin's one-page review — it actually appeared in volume 6, number 2.) Perhaps the accuracy of essays that are awarded prizes and otherwise lauded ought to be checked before they are published. Without such careful checking, it is impossible to know whether a writer is careful, accurate, or responsible.

I trust that *DIALOGUE* will continue to publish other views of the problems associated with writing Mormon history. The apologists for a naturalistic history have had an opportunity to attack those they consider critics and thereby defend their own views. Those who oppose Revisionist History have been stigmatized as "traditionalists" (Alexander, Fall 1986, pp. 25-30, 41-45) or as constituting a conservative "far right" position (Hill, Fall 1988, pp. 117, 118). They have also been accused of being grossly uninformed (Hill, p. 124; Alexander, p. 41), and of intentional, shameless, and obtuse misrepresentation of the views of others (Alexander, pp. 37-38, 41-42, 44-46). Furthermore, they are indicted by Hill for "not listening" to what "middle ground historians" have been saying, presumably because, in his psychologizing slur, "they are caught up in their own inner perplexities and turmoils" (p. 125). Those who have questions about the soundness of Revisionist History deserve an opportunity to respond to such charges, or at least to present their own views.

It would be a shame if, after thirty or more years in which some large advances

have been made in Mormon history, the door is now slammed on a genuine dialogue on the theoretical or philosophical issues that surround the study of Mormon origins. The publication of Bradford's essay (Winter 1988) is an encouraging indication that this may not happen. But much more is needed. One would assume that apolo- gists for Revisionist History would welcome a genuinely free and open discussion, especially if the position of their critics is as problematic as has been alleged by Hill and Alexander.

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Is That History?

I would like to respond to Thomas Alexander, Gerald Bradford, and Mormon historians in general. One historian writes a different history than another, rendering the facts in differing contexts, depending upon the nature, experience, and disposition of the historian. Here is my guess as to how each of several Mormons might report the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. I have rank-ordered these individuals according to their religious conservatism:

Louis C. Midgley: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be praised for sending forth an angel to lead the Prophet Joseph Smith to where ancient records were buried."

Jerald Tanner: "Joseph Smith LIED when he said that an angel appeared to him and led him to a hill where gold plates were buried."

Stephen R. Covey: "After getting in touch with the divine center, the Prophet Joseph Smith was visited by an angel who led him to where ancient records were buried."

M. Gerald Bradford: "Nothing makes me so furious as Mormons, more liberal than I, whose accounts vary from these exact words: 'An angel led the Prophet

Joseph Smith to a hill where ancient plates were buried.'"

Thomas G. Alexander: "Joseph claimed that an angel appeared to him to lead him to a hill where ancient records were buried."

Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton: "What we are about to say should be prefaced by our telling you that we are both active Mormons, possessing temple recom- mends: Joseph Smith claimed that an angel appeared to him to lead him to a hill where ancient records were buried."

Sterling M. McMurrin: "A first step toward the Prophet's denying the dominant Christian doctrine of ex-nihilo was his ac- quiring ancient plates, buried in a hill."

Fawn M. Brodie: "Psychological forces were brought to bear on Joseph, which resulted in his coming up with a story about an angel appearing to him and leading him to a hill where ancient plates were buried."

G. Eugene England: "Lowell Bennion and I talked about Joseph Smith's being visited by the Angel Moroni, who led Joseph to where the Book of Mormon plates were buried. We have found several pas- sages in that book indicating to us that had Moroni lived in our own day, he would have given blacks the priesthood, set us straight on how there won't be polygamy in heaven after all, and solicited groups to gather food for the hungry people of Poland and the earthquake victims of Armenia."

Rustin Kaufman: "An angel led the Prophet Joseph Smith to a hill where ancient plates were buried."

Richard L. Evans: "The spiritual ex- periences of the Prophet Joseph Smith, in acquiring the Book of Mormon plates, place him in the company of the greatest religious leaders in world history."

Mark Hofmann: "An angel led the Prophet Joseph Smith to a hill where he met a salamander."

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Is She at Home?

In "The Need for a New Mormon Heaven" (Fall 1988) Melodie Charles calls for

more caution from those who project onto Mother in Heaven the traditional earthly model of housewife and nurturer of children. I would prefer that we project no model of womanhood into heaven to define her. Instead, since revelation often comes when questions are asked, I am encouraging Church authorities to ask for revelation about her. Then we might learn what she really is (p. 85).

At the same time, Charles laments that the Church says very little about Mother in Heaven: "She appears fewer than ten times, always as 'mother in heaven' (all small case), in contrast to forty plus appearances of 'Heavenly Father' (capitalized), and twenty plus appearances of Jesus" (p. 83).

Charles seems to be asking for it both ways — say more and project less. Yet she herself — though awaiting further revelation — projects her own model of womanhood onto Mother in Heaven: "I can see why today's General Authorities who define womanhood as stay-at-home mothering would also envision her this way. But I can't see any reason now to let *such a degrading concept* of the female deity continue to exist without protest" (p. 84, italics added).

In contrast, the Church refrains from official pronouncements expanding our notion of Heavenly Mother, while apparently not interfering in the considerable unofficial speculation on the subject. Perhaps given a few hundred years of future Church history we may evolve a tradition about Heavenly Mother every bit as rich, and probably binding, as the Catholics have about the Virgin Mary, with or without further revelation on the subject.

I hear more speculation about Heavenly Mother from the liberal and feminist ranks of the Church than from the more traditional sectors, which is fine. I hear about a Heavenly Mother equal in power

and status with the Father. Assuming that is true, we can make several inferences. Wherever Heavenly Mother is or whatever she is doing, *she* has chosen not to reveal herself. Apparently she is not into nurturing her earthly children right now.

What is she doing then? Perhaps she is too busy in the pre-earth realms (the nursery, if you will) to check on her adolescents in mortality — a very stay-at-home mother. Or perhaps she is wonderfully individuated and self-actualizing, traveling about a more interesting galaxy, leaving the children under the auspices of Dad and big brother. But whoever and wherever she is, she certainly has not visited here for a very long time.

Occasionally I hear a prayer that includes a supplication or other acknowledgment of Heavenly Mother. When I do, I sense a yearning for nurturing, for some time at home. "Are you listening, Mom? Look in on us! Tell us you love us and care how we're doing. Give us some insight on being a woman . . . or on just being. But most of all, be our mother." I doubt that people who offer such prayers think it is degrading for Heavenly Mother to answer her children's prayers, to carry on conversations in our childish language, or stay close enough to this galaxy so that even in this tiny portion of eternity we may feel her presence.

Underneath the rhetoric, I sense that nineteenth-century Mormon men weren't the only ones to envision a Mother in Heaven as a bearer and nurturer of children. Is it possible that the contemporary, liberated Mormon woman yearns for some nurturing contact from a Heavenly Mother who is more available to her children? Somehow that kind of stay-at-home mothering does not seem degrading. "One-dimensional" might be a better characterization on which to focus objections.

Personally I quite enjoy the speculation about Heavenly Mother. I think Melodie Charles has every right to project her favorite model of womanhood onto Heavenly Mother — as long as she reserves the

same right for others, even those who advocate “degrading” stay-at-home mothering. In a sense we are all like orphaned or adopted children who can’t help wondering about our “real mother.” Forbidding a child to speculate about an absentee mother would be foolish; it is equally fruitless to tell each other not to speculate about Heavenly Mother. We would be in real danger, however, if we held so firmly to our own ideas — in this area of almost total ignorance — that we then began to judge everyone else’s spiritual worthiness on our own opinion.

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More Than Two Cultures

C. Brooklyn Derr, in his “Messages from Two Cultures: Mormon Leaders in France, 1985” (Summer 1988), has given a very interesting report about Mormons in France. Although he used technical data and summarized his findings in a professional way, I feel it is important to remember that his description of the religious life of French Mormons and his claims about what makes French Mormons unique are limited to a very small group. His data indicate that there are cultural differences in French/American and LDS/non-LDS comparisons, but these differences may not apply to all French Mormons.

Derr has done an admirable job of comparing two similar groups — LDS leaders in two different countries and cultures. However, his study was limited geographically and socially, as he dealt mostly with members of the Church living in the Parisian region and with educated executives rather than working class leaders. Derr’s personal experiences gave us a glance at other categories of members, but he didn’t elaborate on them. It would be interesting to see how an LDS American would encounter LDS culture in France outside of the educated, Parisian area.

I think Derr would have found other important differences if he had distin-

guished between “native Mormons” and “converts” in France, for instance. I came to make this distinction while working at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah. My job there allowed me to become acquainted with many international LDS young people who came to the MTC to prepare for missions. I noticed that “native” French Mormons — those born into Latter-day Saint families or whose families were converted while they were still young — had less difficulty adapting to their American companions and the unique MTC way of life than did the “converts” — those recently converted to the gospel, whose families may not be members of the Church.

From my experience, converts had more difficulty adjusting to new relationships, especially with their companions. Being relatively new members, still very sensitive in their religious beliefs, they expected a mostly spiritual experience and found it difficult to cope with the “material” aspects of mission life — the daily routine, the need for basic financial and physical preparations, the differences of opinion and conflict between missionaries. Compared to native members, who usually adapted within one or two weeks to the MTC discipline and to their companions, French converts were more critical and often became disillusioned.

I conclude that some unique aspects of Mormon culture are basically the same all over the world, even though Mormonism may differ between countries in minor ways. While native Mormons have found a way to adjust to this “bicultural” dilemma (living in both a secular and religious culture), converts need time to make this adjustment. The longer one is part of this Mormon culture, the easier it is to deal with the conflicts with non-LDS cultures.

I am familiar with one ward and two branches in eastern France. These three LDS communities do not resemble each other and do not resemble the ward described by Derr. The Mulhouse Ward is known as a “worker’s ward,” the Colmar

Branch is called "bourgeois" (although there are no rich members), and the Belfort Branch, with only about twenty members, is too small for such categorizing. In Mulhouse, for example, most members are from working class areas and are skilled laborers. Very few have university education. In Colmar, the seat of government for the *département* (equal in importance to a state capital in the USA), some members work for the government or related organizations; others are property owners or educators. The Colmar Branch social structure is very different from the Mulhouse Ward, and likely very different from a Parisian setting.

In each of these LDS communities, natives and converts can be distinguished by their ways of life and how they deal with the bicultural problems French Latter-day Saints face. Natives are more at ease being Mormon and French, while many converts are still trying to integrate their old way of life with the newly acquired one. For example, many converts still have a hard time being polite in social occasions where coffee or wine are served. But natives who have never practiced the social habit of coffee or wine are less embarrassed about it, as it is natural for them not to drink.

Derr's description of home teaching visits is an example of behavior within the Church that is also not true of all French Mormons. He described very formal visits in a traditional French or Parisian style. In Mulhouse, for example, where there are many native Mormons, the casual, unannounced home teaching visit is not uncommon, and members are much less formal with each other than Derr describes. They do not feel that a monthly (or more frequent) visit is an intrusion. This may be because they know each other more intimately or because their social background is different and they would not be so formal with any guests.

I found many things interesting and of value in Derr's article but of course would like to see more studies in this area. I am

fascinated by Mormon culture. As a convert, I have lived with these kinds of problems and think it is interesting that in our time we can watch the development of the unique LDS culture — a rare phenomenon in the world these days!

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Greater Equality for All

Lee Copeland's article "From Calcutta to Kaysville: Is Righteousness Color-coded?" (Fall 1988) rightly identifies a major area where culture has invaded doctrine by teaching racial superiority on the basis of scant or no scriptural support.

It is almost irresistible for those who believe in our premortal existence as sentient beings with responsibility for our conduct to connect that conduct with our birth circumstances. This view finds reinforcement in such statements as Paul's that "God . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:24–26). This suggests that while we are all of "one blood," we are born where and when we are for a purpose. I believe that.

However, our ignorance about God's purposes almost insures that our assumptions about them will be wrong. Though my first impulse is to think that for someone to be born rich, white, smart, healthy, American, and Mormon would be a reward, my second thought is that in an eternal view, such birth circumstances could well be a curse, because character is developed more by successful struggle with difficulties than by ambling along the easy path. In any event, it is highly presumptuous of us to judge the significance of life's events and circumstances on the basis of our terribly limited view of things. Belief in a premortal existence, by opening up additional possible explanations, should make us less rather than more sure. I

understand the compulsion to explain the differences in birth, in wealth and poverty, health and suffering. But any answer we might think we see simply raises new questions. Copeland quotes statements that seem incredibly insensitive today. The statements are particularly troubling when coming from people we hope would be more insightful and tolerant than most. It is another reminder to us that divine calling does not make for infallibility or even wisdom.

If we look for extenuation, we can say that our leaders were no worse than most others of the time, though we wish we could say they were better. And the attitudes expressed have not been restricted to Western society. Whites and Americans have had no corner on prejudice. Members of other races have thought that whites were barbarous, laughable, and ill-smelling. And children of mixed races have often been poorly accepted by both groups.

Much of the rhetoric may offend us, but it was not intended to offend. Emphasis on the blessedness of the speaker's and audience's birth conditions was not designed to degrade those of other races, but to explain why so much was properly to be expected of the listeners. In context, statements about the supremacy of the white race were often urging *noblesse oblige*. Though they have a negative side, the statements were intended as a spur to do good. That does not make them true or desirable, for they tended both to perpetuate negative stereotypes and to suggest an unwarranted entitlement to higher status, but it does drain them of some malignancy.

Spencer W. Kimball is rightly identified as one who fought intolerance, but he still consistently counseled caution in interracial marriage. His concerns were several. First, if one married a partner whose priesthood was limited because of race, he or she was choosing to share in those limitations by giving up the opportunity of temple marriage. Happily that concern has now disappeared. Second, he felt that partners with different backgrounds (and in his day,

race almost always indicated significantly different cultural background) faced added difficulties in relating well to one another. And third, additional stress on their marriage would come from outside, from the likely isolation from both cultures. I think, for example, of a couple I know who some years ago moved to Hawaii hoping to find greater tolerance for their racially mixed marriage.

In addition to the statements quoted by Copeland (p. 92), other earlier ones in similar vein are set out in *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*:

[W]e must discourage intermarriage, [but] not because it is sin. I would like to make this very emphatic. . . . But it is not expedient [i.e., wise]. Marriage statistics and our general experience convince us that marriage is not easy. It is difficult when all factors are favorable. The divorces increase constantly, even where the spouses have the same general background of race, religion, finances, education, and otherwise (E. Kimball 1982, 302).

This was a 1958 talk to seminary and institute teachers. And in a letter, probably written in 1959, he said, "The interracial marriage problem is not one of inferiority or superiority. The difficulties and hazards of marriage are greatly increased where backgrounds are different. For a wealthy person to marry a pauper promises difficulties. For an ignoramus to marry one with a doctor's degree promises difficulties" (in E. Kimball 1977, 302).

This further illustration of his views appears in his biography:

A white girl was considering marriage to an Indian college student. Her parents came to Elder Kimball, objecting. He agreed with them that such a marriage carried with it greater risks than marriage between people of similar racial and cultural backgrounds, but he told them there was no wrong in it. He would not encourage it, but neither would he try to block it. A year later the young couple were married in the temple; Elder Kimball performed the ceremony. The bride's parents refused to attend (Kimball and Kimball 1977, 342).

The limited information on stability of racially mixed marriages that Copeland cites seems counterintuitive, but if accurate and well publicized, it could make a great deal of difference. That seems an important area for research. If, in fact, it were clear that such marriages run no special risk, opposition to them would then be seen as based in prejudice rather than wisdom.

Racial attitudes of whites in the United States have come a long way in recent years. Change has come as blacks have been consciously reinserted into world history and as Asia has ascended as a world economic power. And in the Church, the revelation on priesthood has had an effect. The enormous success of missionary work in many countries with different racial and ethnic backgrounds from those in North America and Europe — where the first missionary success came — will inevitably bring more change in attitudes. We can expect a greater acceptance of the ultimate equality before God of all people. Considering our biblical roots, we shall probably never abandon an interest in lineage, but there is now and will be greater emphasis on spiritual alliance resulting from mortal choice than on physical heritage resulting from premortal assignment.

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It's No Accident

I thoroughly enjoyed David Bailey's splendid article, "Scientific Foundations of Mormon Theology" (Summer 1988). It is as full of goodies as a plum pudding and well deserves the first place it won in the DIALOGUE 1987 writing awards for phi-

losophy and religion. His prose is so good that almost anyone, even I, can begin to understand relativity, cosmology, and other tricky subjects.

I am glad that Bailey welcomes comments on the notion that we are preprogrammed to be born into a certain situation: i.e., parents, environment, problems. The subject recently came up in a Relief Society class, and the consensus was that at least some spirits were chosen before birth to fill sensitive roles. This doesn't seem quite democratic to me. I would rather think that we all earn our place because of the way we keep our first estate. We are placed where we — and in some cases, humanity — can benefit. Let the spirit be right for the place, and let genetics take care of the body.

Mark Twain certainly thought we were predestined for certain roles when he wrote:

Prov'dence don't fire no blank ca'tridges, boys. . . . There ain't no such thing as an accident. When my Uncle Lem was leaning up agin a scaffolding once, sick, or drunk, or suthin, an Irishman with a hod full of bricks fell on him out of the third story and broke the old man's back in two places. People said it was an accident. Much accident there was about that! He didn't know what he was there for, but he was there for a good object. If he hadn't been there the Irishman would have been killed. Nobody can ever make me believe anything different from that. Uncle Lem's dog was there. Why didn't the Irishman fall on the dog? Becuz the dog would a seen him a coming and stood from under. That's the reason the dog warn't appinted. A dog can't be depended on to carry out a special providence. Mark my words, it was a put-up thing (*Roughing It*, vol. 2, ch. 12).

As to Bailey's worry about how God could handle all the details of matching children to parents, we have a great thing in the Church called "delegation." People in metaphysics call these planners the "Lords of Karma"; the American Indians call them the "Grandfathers." Sir Edwin Arnold had another solution: "Don't poets know/ Better than others?/ God can't

be always everywhere; and, so/ Invented Mothers.”

Besides, the placement might not have to be all that precise. Consider this. While Sam'l and I were engaged, he once said in a burst of enthusiasm, “You are one in a thousand!” (Was this after he found I could type ninety words a minute?) Then he went on in a typical Taylor way, “That means, of course, that there are 999 other girls who would do as well.” He thought a minute. “It would be a matter of sorting them out, and it would take a lot of time. I do have my writing career to consider. On the whole, I think I'll let it go as it is.”

Gay Taylor
Redwood City, California

A Means of Support

As a freshman at Ricks College in 1978, I spent most of my free time reading and listening to Paul H. Dunn. By the time I completed my mission in 1981, I was strictly a Bruce R. McConkie fan. Returning to Ricks, I found myself slowly converting to Hugh Nibley, which led to my embracing *BYU Studies*, *Sunstone*, *Journal of Mormon History*, and *DIALOGUE*. I don't mean to say that I've “grown out” of General Authorities, but by arriving at *DIALOGUE*, I have truly found something that makes me proud to be a Latter-day Saint and helps me appreciate my religion more than ever.

I first became familiar with *DIALOGUE* while reading Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book *Mormonism — Shadow or Reality?* at Ricks College. The Tanners quoted from its articles and essays enough for me to become intrigued. Finally, I located someone who had copies, and on 15 September 1985 I had my first look at *DIALOGUE*. After spending a fortune copying articles to keep me busy reading, I finally became a subscriber. As one of the steps of repentance is to make restitution where possible, I am now spending most of my time and money securing copies of every back

issue of *DIALOGUE* until I have them all. Truly *DIALOGUE* has become one of my best friends, and I'll give you a few reasons why.

For more than eight years, some members of my ward have met together as a study group. My wife and I joined this group two years ago. The meetings rotate from home to home, with the host giving the lesson. For my first turn, I presented a historical overview of Mormon polygamy. For the post-Manifesto period, of course I referred to Michael Quinn's study which appeared in *DIALOGUE* (Spring 1985). Everyone seemed to enjoy this “controversial” evening.

Eight months later, when it was my turn again, we had been discussing one chapter per month of Joseph Fielding Smith's *Doctrines of Salvation*, and my lesson happened to be the chapter on the Adam-God theory. The class was expecting me to agree with President Smith that Brigham Young never taught the doctrine, case closed. Yet I couldn't say that and be honest. I was well aware that it would be difficult and perhaps offensive to some to say otherwise. So, I took a chance and in as faith-promoting a way as possible shared some thoughts from David John Buerger's *DIALOGUE* article, “The Adam-God Doctrine” (Spring 1982). Several members of the study group seemed to feel that my view that Brigham taught the doctrine bordered on apostasy. It didn't help matters when my bishop grabbed my copy of *DIALOGUE* and made it very clear that this was not a Church publication and that someone he knew very well who read this journal faithfully was now without a testimony.

I left that night feeling very hurt (wishing Hugh B. Brown were there to comfort me) yet more committed to *DIALOGUE* and its purpose. Two weeks later, this bishop submitted my name to the stake to be called as his executive secretary. Later, my ward clerk friend said that the bishop wanted me because I seemed “somewhat intellectual, and this calling should help” me.

While the study group experience left me feeling alone, *DIALOGUE* has surely been my means of support. I know the feeling of Jack and Linda Newell when they said "Without *DIALOGUE*, it would have been easy to conclude that we were oddballs who didn't have a place in the Church. But the articles in the journal kept reminding us that we weren't alone and we weren't even that odd." This has been a comfort to me, although I wish someone, somewhere near me had the same interest in scholarly Mormon studies, especially Church history, as I do. Just once I would like to say to someone, "What did you think of Mike Quinn's recent article?" "Do you agree with Jan Stout's essay on homosexuality?" "Wasn't David Buerger's study of the development of the temple endowment ceremony informative and stimulating?"

I have come to admire and respect those who started *DIALOGUE* and those who now and in the past have put this journal together for people like me to read and consider.

Thank you, *DIALOGUE*, and may you be around long enough to have a "Special Millennium Issue"!

Devery Scott Anderson
Kelso, Washington

An Elitist Class?

I am pleased beyond measure to have recently found the 1988 summer and fall issues of *DIALOGUE* in a local bookstore. In reading through them cover to cover, I'm distressed to discover that you have celebrated your twentieth anniversary and I have missed so much.

When I was very young, I asked my Junior Sunday School teacher who our Heavenly Mother was. She responded that I should not ask such questions. In high school seminary I asked, if the inspired version of the Bible is true, why not teach from it? Once again I was told that this was one of the mysteries, not to be discussed. I openly applaud your candid pub-

lished thoughts on the many topics that you seem to cover. While I cannot agree with all that you print, I am very happy to have discovered a source of intelligent opinion, right or wrong.

I wish you and those who submit materials to be published the very best in the next twenty years. I would like to add a note of caution: overusing the term "intellectual" denotes an elitist class, not consistent with the grass roots member, the lay clergy. I would hope that neither you nor I take ourselves too seriously in our quest for knowledge of all things, thereby losing sight of the fact that the Church is true, despite the ever present holes in the cloth.

Rodney J. Sorensen
Mendon, Utah

LDSF4

Following the publication of our first three science fiction anthologies, we are now gathering stories for *LDSF4* (1991) and are looking for speculative or supernatural science fiction or fantasy with LDS characters or themes, rated G and full of action and conflict. Please send manuscripts and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

Benjamin Urrutia, Editor
2015 South 200 East, Apt. 31
Salt Lake City, Utah 84115

Miller-Eccles Study Group

Eight years ago Ron Miller and I started a study group in southern California. Both Ron and I were working in the stake mission presidency and had organized firesides so that stake members could invite their friends to hear outstanding LDS scholars such as Leonard Arrington.

Ron and I agreed that a small meeting with scholars held away from the Church building and organization would be enlight-

ening and open to a free flow of discussion and ideas. We invited friends from the local area, suggested a modest donation, and arranged to have Leonard Arrington meet with us. This first meeting was so successful that we met a second time, and a third, and are now meeting nearly ten times a year. Our group has grown from a few personal friends to a mailing list of nearly 200 from all over southern California. We also have organized ourselves into a nonprofit association and have obtained a tax exempt status, so donations are tax deductible. Although our primary focus is Church history, four out of ten meetings

deal with sociology, ancient scripture or history, current events, or other topics.

I wonder how many other groups there are like us. If you belong to one, I would appreciate a note telling me what you do and how. Perhaps if we shared information on discussion topics, speakers, financing, etc., we could all benefit.

I must say that the articles in *DIALOGUE* have provided a continuing list of topics and speakers for us. Keep up the good work.

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