

PERSONAL VOICES

Edited by Eugene England

GROWING UP MORMON

Maturity for a New Era

Eugene England

Eugene England is Dean of Academic Affairs at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, and President of the nearby Faribault Branch of the L.D.S. Church. He grew up in Downey, Idaho, and Salt Lake City. He and his wife, Charlotte, served missions together in Samoa shortly after their marriage. He attended the University of Utah and Stanford, where he was one of the founders of DIALOGUE.

This issue begins *Dialogue's* sixth year of publication. It was, in fact, exactly six years ago that a group of us — some close friends, some mere acquaintances — committed ourselves to each other in a common venture, the implications of which we then sensed with joy and some fear and little certainty. It was an act of faith — that much we knew: faith in the Gospel, that it would flourish in the light of reason, in the nourishing stream of ideas and questions from all sources, in the warmth of honest, loving dialogue. It was also an act of faith in the Church and in ourselves: that we and our brothers and sisters had come far enough in history to be able to speak and listen well, to hear what anyone might say about us and about things most precious to us, with openness, without rancor; and further, that the Saints could develop a sense of humor. And it was finally action begun in the faith that we editors could bear the responsibility of causing thoughts and feelings to be expressed irrevocably in print, and could fulfill the needs of our readers and authors and still stay solvent.

The Gospel has vindicated our faith marvelously, the Church and ourselves not so well. Many — most I am certain — who have contributed to *Dialogue* or read it carefully have found their understanding and conviction of the Gospel made stronger and more intelligent, more open and sen-

sitive, more humane and joyful, in a word, more mature. On the other hand, some brothers and sisters have been split “for” and “against” *Dialogue*; a few cruel rumors have been started and passed on about the Church standing, even the faith and morals of editors and writers; certain local Church leaders have used their offices to suppress the journal and probably to disenfranchise editors and supporters from normal service in the Church.

And we have not filled our own responsibilities perfectly by any means: despite our early high idealism we have made many mistakes, typographical, editorial, especially managerial and financial — many political errors and probably some religious ones. For a pioneering work we moved too rapidly in some areas, have probably not been outspoken enough in others. We have survived financially at times by *mere faith*, have essentially neglected promotion, and have let the burdens of editing pile up on a few; as a result we have fallen behind in processing manuscripts and building readership and now in meeting our publication deadlines.

We have acted over the past year to remedy these problems and I am pleased to look forward now to a great new era for *Dialogue*. With the original editors scattered from New Mexico to Africa, we have relocated our central editorial office in Los Angeles. Robert Rees,

who teaches English at UCLA, is the new chief editor; he has organized editorial associates there and has a newly appointed Board of Advisors working with him to provide financial and managerial stability. A separate group of editorial associates under the direction of Edward Geary of B.Y.U. will work in Utah, especially on the planning of special theme issues. Original editors Wesley Johnson, Paul Salisbury and I will continue to share in shaping the editorial vision of *Dialogue* through participation on the Executive Committee and through our own writing and commissioning of work. An expertly managed fund-raising and promotion campaign has begun, and Bob Rees has been provided the resources he needs to have the editorial functions caught up and running relatively smoothly and on time within six months.

This reorganization and fresh beginning fills me with new hope for the contribution *Dialogue* can make, as a journal dedicated to mature Mormon thought and faith, in what I feel is a new era of maturity for the Church. Despite some rumblings that a purge of intellectuals and liberals is afoot (almost as if there had to be one to fulfill the strong forebodings of some about what would surely come with the Presidency of Joseph Fielding Smith, the author of the uncompromisingly anti-evolutionary *Man, His Origin and Destiny*), the Prophet has brought an era marked by a marvelous new tolerance and breadth in his own sermons on one hand and on the other an exciting new spirit of confident venturesomeness in actions of the Church: appointment of young men of spiritual and intellectual power and cultural breadth from outside the Utah establishment to head the Church schools; new professionalism and courage in the reorganized Church publications (the September *New Era* has a relatively open discussion of contemporary issues ~ war, pollution, Women's Liberation, etc. — that the old *Era* didn't seem to know existed); new confidence and sophistication in our mission as a universal Church — building schools in Latin America and Europe, holding general conference in Britain, organizing stakes in Japan and Africa, opening up new missions in India and Thailand; bold moves in development of the Church's social services, provision of professional counseling aid to bishops, and the calling recently of

the first medical missionaries, etc. And with all this the prophetic voice calling to faith and discipline is vigorous, as for example in President Harold B. Lee, who in recent speeches and articles has on the one hand severely chastised those who began to organize vigilante groups in their gullible, racist response to a bogus prophecy circulated about Blacks invading our mountain sanctuary, and on the other hand has severely denounced those destroyers of faith who refuse to perceive and hold to the uncompromising rigor of basic Gospel principles — the iron rod — and would lead the Church in the direction of liberal Protestantism.

The great L.D.S. historian, theologian and General Authority, B. H. Roberts predicted (in the *Improvement Era*, 1906, p. 713) that "disciples of 'Mormonism' growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; cooperating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression, and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development." Contrary to the opinions of critics in and out of the Church who have insisted that in this century Mormonism would harden into a dead, bureaucratic shell of its spirited, primitive self, Elder Roberts' prophecies are being fulfilled, particularly in the sustained energy and creativity of new converts and among the young.

And just as Mormonism is maturing further under the new prophet and the new vitality brought both by the stream of new saints from many nations and the improvement of organization and teaching, we are seeking maturity in our own personal faith and living, many of us trying to come to terms with what it means and has meant to grow up Mormon. I will write about the experience in this column — the burden and blessing of my youth in Mormon country and my present struggle, along with the Church's, to mature, to grow toward the measure of fulness of the stature of Christ.

The other columns which begin this continuing section of personal voices will express a great variety of opinions and experiences of maturing Mormons — strug-