

Letters to the Editor



statistical significance

Harold Christensen's article, "Mormon Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective," is one of those articles where the footnotes are more important than the text. Careful reading of these notes indicates that the "Mormons" in Christensen's study were 220 students registered in sociology and other social science classes at an intermountain university. Such a sample hardly represents a cross section of the membership in this international Church. More importantly, only 70% of Christensen's sample identified themselves as Mormons. Since many of the responses reported in the article were at a level of less than 30%, it is entirely possible that these results could have been produced solely by the Gentile members of the sample group.

In his figures and charts, Christensen called his sample group "Intermountain," but in his conclusions he referred to "Mormons." Even if his entire sample were made up of Mormons, there is a difference between believing and nonbelieving Mormons. Christensen tried to account for this by measuring levels of Church attendance, but I am not convinced that in college-age groups Church attendance is equivalent to belief in Church doctrine.

D. James Croft
Salt Lake City, Utah

Harold Christensen responds

Although D. James Croft raises some important questions concerning my article, "Mormon

Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspective," I do not believe his critique is completely accurate nor his conclusions valid in view of the care with which I have reported my admittedly limited data—including many qualifying phrases and cautions to the reader. Note the following as examples: "suggested relationship" and "the problem clearly needs further study," (p. 64, last paragraph); "I suggest that this be viewed with caution" and "I speculate that" and "It may be that" (p. 68, lines 24, 36–37, 45); "My data suggest" (p. 71, line 14); and "It seems reasonable to assume" (p. 73, last two lines). At several points I stress the need for further research (e.g., bottom of p. 64 and top of p. 74) and in footnote 27 I say:

Certain of these problem areas have been rather clearly delineated by the data, while others have received only tenuous support. But even as hypotheses requiring further testing—which is all I intend them to be at this stage of research—they can provide valuable clues for understanding the forces affecting sexual patterns within Mormon culture.

I have faithfully reported and cautiously interpreted the data available, but at no time have I claimed them to be from a cross-section of Mormon culture or to be entirely representative of the Church as a whole. They nevertheless do, it seems to me, *reflect* up aspects of the Church and, when seen against a backdrop of comparable non-Mormon university data, they can offer clues to phenomena that are in need of study. The paper's title could, I suppose, have been more definitive—say something like, "Aspects of Mormon Sexuality as Reflected in a Comparison of Mormon with non-Mormon University Questionnaire Data." But then why be so stilted when there is the alternative of letting the title suggest the general topic with the paper itself spelling out qualifications and specifics?

Ideally, larger samples drawn randomly would have been preferable. But, as every social science researcher knows, it sometimes is necessary either to abandon one's research or to settle for something short of the ideal, especially when—as was true in this instance—the subject is sensitive and there are institutional roadblocks along the way. In obtaining my largely Mormon sample, it was necessary for me to promise anonymity to the cooperating university and "Intermountain" was the covering term agreed upon at that time. I was glad to do this and have kept to the commitment. Yet no other university has made such a request nor presented other difficulties of this kind.

Mr. Croft makes a point of there being only 70 percent Mormons in my Intermountain sample. Seventy-seven percent would be more accurate, for the 18 respondents who failed to specify religion should be excluded from the calculations (data provided in footnotes 1 and 2). Even so, there admittedly is a non-Mormon portion of the Intermountain sample. But it seems almost incredible to me for anyone to believe that the results which I report could be produced "solely by the Gentile members of the sample group." Just a look at item 8 in Table 1 should convince one otherwise: approval and experience percentages for the Mormon subgroup alone remain significantly high. Furthermore, the effect of removing non-Mormons from the Intermountain sample is to *accentuate* the contrast with Midwest I, not the reverse of this.

My article as published was considerably shortened from the original during the editing process and, because of this, discussions about method and procedure got shortchanged. Still, the reader was provided with a complete reference list of previous publications from this ongoing cross-cultural study and was invited to consult these sources for amplification—including discussions of research limitations (see second paragraph of footnote 2).

If Mr. Croft is asking for improved and continuing research on Mormon sexuality, I am all for that. Certainly I do not regard my research as the last word; far from it. But one has to start somewhere; and if the endeavor is worthwhile—as I am convinced this one is—why not begin, even if this means that the early work is mainly exploratory, to provide clues or hypotheses for more definitive work to follow. Drawing tentative conclusions from exploratory research, so labeled, is not "risky business," except that there always may be some who misinterpret what is being done.

Harold Christensen
La Jolla, California

I appreciated receiving the sexuality issue. The charts and graphs tickled my rational engineer self a little. But only a little—and then I came to "Solus" and the poems. As I read them, it was like a breath of fresh clean air—such truth! my friends, straight from the heart where it counts.

Blessings and peace,
Eugene Kovalenko
North Hollywood, California

I consider the issue dealing with sexuality a fine contribution and would like to congratulate *Dialogue* and the guest editors for the high quality of their effort.

Joseph A. Geddes
Boise, Idaho

solus reprise

Regarding "SOLUS" in the Autumn, 1976 issue, I am writing anonymously for the same reason that the article was written anonymously—I share the author's problem. I do differ from his experience, in that my own homosexuality was very active. While I can sympathize with and share some of his feelings and frustrations, I feel a real need to speak out against some of his thoughts and actions.

At some point in his development the author has to learn to control and overcome his feelings; whether on earth or in the hereafter. One of the basic precepts of the gospel is that we take with us when we die, only what we have learned in this life. Having gone through it myself, and having talked to many other homosexuals, I am convinced that it is a *learned* activity. One rape does not a homosexual make—rather it is the thought of homosexual activities, nurtured over a period of time, that causes active homosexual attitudes and activities.

I, too, was very afraid to speak to anyone about my experiences or feelings—least of all my quorum advisor, bishop, or stake president! I did not think that they would be sympathetic, or be able to give me proper guidance. When I finally did get up the nerve (because my actions finally demanded it) I found out how wrong I was.

I learned that my problem was not as unique as I had imagined, and that the Church leaders want to help one to repent. I was never ridiculed.

In spite of feelings that still surface, just as anyone's sexual fantasies do, no matter what they are, I served an honorable mission. I found a wonderful wife, whom I married in the temple. I have an excellent sexual relationship with her. I serve actively in the Church, and I don't lie to my leaders when I'm being interviewed for my temple recommend. That can only lead to severe problems. My bishop helps me set goals that aid me in overcoming the thoughts that still arise. His help greatly aids me in remaining "worthy."

So from the perspective of a Church member who shares the problem, I empathize, but I still cannot condone some of the actions the "SOLUS" author has taken and wants to have accepted by others. He has to learn to control

his appetites and passions the same as all other Church members have to control their own weaknesses. *Yes*, there is a place in the Church for homosexuals. But they must be repentant and striving to overcome their problem. They must be honest with their Church leaders. And they cannot be complacent or resign themselves to solving the problem after this life. It will go with them, and be just as hard, if not harder to solve, there.

Solus III

The *Dialogue* issue on *Sexuality and Mormon Culture* is splendid although my fears were realized: all from a male point of view except the poetry and Shirley Paxman's review!

Loneta Murphy
Provo, Utah

"greg" boomerangs

I appreciate your allowing us to reprint "Greg" in the *BOOMERANG* magazine. Your last issue of *Dialogue* encouraged our staff to publish an issue on morality—a subject we have considered for a long while.

"Greg" was an excellent contribution to our magazine, and we feel it will help many youth who can identify with it.

Scott Mulvay, Managing Editor
Salt Lake City, Utah

table manners

Congratulations on publishing some fine pieces of work. I continue to see substantial good in *Dialogue*, but sometimes I also see cuteness and even downright poor taste. I do not mean that what I object to is overwhelming, but occasionally it disturbs me, particularly because it seems gratuitous and easily avoidable. For example, regarding the Adam-Eve woodcut, since some General Authorities have pointedly said that the "Fall" did not constitute nor consist of sexual sin or initiation, the design(s) implying the contrary in connection with the issue of "sexuality" must constitute a defiant, or at least insensitive assertion.

I still consider the journal a good friend. It is just that this friend has some social habits which give me pause. Like emitting a hearty belch just before dessert is served, or talking too loud at parties. These trying ways to not mean I shall break off my friendship, but I do admit to sometimes choosing a seat at another part of the table and once in a while acting as if I do not know who he is.

John L. Sorenson
Provo, Utah

a voice crying . . .

You can't imagine how encouraged and gratified I am to hear of the continued viability of *Dialogue*. The fact of which I have not infrequently been in grave doubt intermittently over the years by virtue of long periods of total silence and near year-long intervals between issues since I became a subscriber back in the spring of 1966 and received my treasured Volume I, No. 1 which is still in a very special location on my bookshelf. As to *Dialogue's* "wellness," once again I must confess to serious concern. My last issue received was Autumn 1976, and I have thus far received nothing, no verification, nary a word from you. I respectfully request a response—some kind of a response—from *Dialogue* immediately.

R. Forrest Allred, M.D.
Fresno, California

By now you should have received the media issue. By the end of the year all should be well.
Editor.

I believe that *Dialogue* will have to work on its public image in the stronghold of Mormonism. There is a rather common feeling among Mormons that a magazine must be published by the Church or at least by BYU to really seriously represent Mormonism. Right or wrong that feeling is there. I'm certainly not telling you something you didn't know. I believe you'll have to work on changing that feeling! Would LDS Ward Libraries accept issues of the magazine? Would Mission Presidents accept issues or write something for a special issue on Proselyting? Perhaps you could find someone who has a supply of first facts about Utah—who might expand it to the Mormons—and use some of these as interesting fillers!

A. Thomas Challis
Librarian, Southern Utah State College
Cedar City, Utah

how about christianity yesterday?

When I heard about *Dialogue*, I hoped that it would examine the theology of the Church, the interaction of the various doctrines, and their impact on "the world out there." I thought that it would be a kind of Mormon "Christianity Today." But *Dialogue* seems to study questions I am not asking while side-stepping those I would like to see discussed. Perhaps I am not ready for *Dialogue*; I am still trying to find out if the Church ever published some sort of Systematic Theology.

I am wondering if Church doctrine can be organized and presented in an orderly and systematic fashion in which one proceeds logically and intelligently from one doctrine to the next. Certainly, a Church which teaches "The glory of God is intelligence" can present its doctrines in a manner which reflects our Heavenly Father's intelligence.

Stephen P. Mitchell
Norfolk, Virginia

mad about media

I think that an opportunity to consider the moral and spiritual implications of imagemakers Mormon or otherwise was missed in Volume X, No. 3. Perhaps I was expecting sharper issues than the "Imagemakers" descriptive subjects permitted. For instance, a round table reaction to Lang's "The Mormon Empire" may have generated issues I felt missing in Ashton's interview.

My subscription check should let you know that my momentary disappointment has not seriously influenced my loyalty to *Dialogue*.

Arthur H. Welsh
Mapleton, Utah

I received your issue on Mormons and the Media. Religion has become too sensitive a topic for *Dialogue*, right? Or is it simply that religion is such a thin vein in Mormonism that you've long since exhausted it?

Robert Ellis Dye
Saint Paul, Minnesota

good friend

Although not a Mormon, I find *Dialogue* to be a very interesting cross section of Mormon character. It serves a valuable place to me in better understanding my Mormon friends.

It was with great anticipation that I noted your intent to catch up with your distribution and to run the magazine in a more business like manner. Your notice that this was my last issue was puzzling, since I had just sent you a renewal in November 1976. I believe your records have been confused. I hope to continue receiving your fine journal which I have received since 1967.

I hope that you will solve your problems and fill the place *Dialogue* has for so many people.

Chuck Geltz
Audubon, Pennsylvania

Sorry for the inconvenience of being billed at the wrong time. The records are now corrected. Editor.

challenge

I am thoroughly bored with the theory that a person's pre-mortal or spirit life determines his place in the present mortal life, and I challenge anyone to show me any scriptural evidence for this idea. Don't come quoting what some Church official said to prove the point. Just reread the source and then read pages 203 and 204, volume 3, Doctrines of Salvation.

Cecil A. Gilbert
Panama City, Florida



ah flattery . . .

Recently a good friend of mine introduced me to your excellent publication. For years I have been looking for something like *Dialogue*. The Church is a very important part of my life and my testimony is strong and precious. At the same time, though, there are certain aspects of Mormon community life which can be extremely stifling and confining. What I find so refreshing about *Dialogue* is that it reinforces me when I start feeling that I am alone in my desire to broaden my horizons. It proves that one can be both a good Latter-day Saint and a skeptic when it comes to politics. There are many, many Church members who feel that unless you are a conservative Republican you are less than true to the Gospel. Keep up the good work.

Jack Hodson
Houston, Texas