

Left Right Left

There is only one reason I am renewing my subscription to *Dialogue*. It is because I have every issue that was ever published since the first issue. If it was not for that I would not continue to subscribe to *Dialogue* because of the liberal leanings of the articles that you now publish. *Dialogue* started out years ago on the liberal side, being critical of the church and its leaders, but then the articles moved more to the center. Now you are back out in the left field again.

I suppose there are those unfaithful members who have a need to bring others down with themselves. As I said if I did not have a complete collection, my subscription would be history.... Please enter my subscription for renewal.

Gale W. Tenney
San Diego, California

Thank you

I have enjoyed Reading *Dialogue* for several years. I was so grateful to read Grant Boswell's article "Easy to be Entreated," vol. 32, no. 4 (Winter 1999), with his treatment of Wayne Booth's *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*. I love the statement: "to the extent that a person is dogmatic, he or she is not acting as a Christian" (69).

I find it difficult to agree with dogmatic attitudes in leaders or members. They make the gospel teaching so confusing and unbelievable. I hope the letters from readers continue in future *Dialogues*. Feedback is very enriching. I am 85 years old, so I feel like I am fortunate if I can continue reading another year. I rejoice in your efforts to catch up and your excellent desire to

give your subscribers an interesting diet.

Rhoda Thurston
Hatch, New Mexico

Scholarly Error is Still Error

In his paper "Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?" (*Dialogue* 32, no. 4) R. Dennis Potter makes the same tragic mistake academically which Mormon leaders often make doctrinally—trying to impose a higher law onto a lesser law. The outcome can only be perversion of truth. The fact that Mr. Potter's discussion presents an intellectually correct reasoning process, including footnotes and references, does not make it any less of a distortion. Scholarly error is still error.

The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ is a gift of LOVE, offered to humanity by a loving God and accomplished by a loving Christ, both of whom abide in the LAW OF LOVE, the Celestial Law, the highest law. To analyze this gracious manifestation of caring from the point of view of the least law, the Law of Justice, the Telestial Law, is a travesty. It denies the pure essence of perfect love inherent in God's entire plan for us.

Christ's suffering was not "punishment" for our sins; he was tortured and crucified because MEN are jealous, ignorant, and cruel, and because mobs lust for blood. Power-hungry men, sometimes even under the guise of "justice," have inflicted pain equally horrendous on many people. It was not his suffering which made Christ's crucifixion different from any other. It was his magnificent LOVE!! It was his perfect caring, which says, "I UNDER-

STAND your untenable situation, living in a fallen world where you will hurt others and be hurt; I am willing to carry that burden with you as long as you need me to; when you recognize my love and choose it, I will heal you." The quality and extent of love this powerful isn't even comprehended by most of mankind and certainly cannot be explained using the Law of Justice.

In his conclusion, Mr. Potter did look at the Law of Mercy, the Terrestrial Law. But again, he tried to impose it on the lesser Law of Justice. The ability to FEEL mercy (an attribute bestowed by God as "a mighty change of heart") is different from the ability to intellectualize about mercy.

Perhaps Mr. Potter should "pray with all the energy of his heart to be filled with the pure love of Christ" (Moroni 7: 46–48) before he tries to analyze Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Gay N. Blanchard
Holladay, Utah

Oh, Ye of Mere Faith

Glen J. Hettinger's article, "Give Me that Old Time Testimony Meeting" (*Dialogue* 32, no. 4) crystallizes beautifully one of the most important problems of today's Mormonism at the personal level: the reduction of faith to a weakness, or worse. Hettinger's article should, in my view, be read by every member of the church along with this scripture: "To some it is given to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful" (D&C 46:13-14).

Unfortunately, as Hettinger writes, today's members are expected to re-

ceive a knowledge, a manifestation or divine confirmation, that the Mormon church is the only true church, Joseph Smith and Gordon B. Hinckley are prophets, and so forth. All worthy members are expected to be able to declare, "I know." Because of this unrealistic expectation, thoughtful members with unresolved religious questions and uncertainties sometimes experience agonizing introspection, emotional difficulties, and self-imposed alienation.

Mormon psychologist Frances Lee Menlove—as published thirty-three years ago in these very pages—described the problem as the "unruffled Mormon syndrome" (*Dialogue* 1, no. 1, Spring 1967). For Dr. Menlove, the unruffled Mormon is a completely fulfilled and integrated Latter-day Saint, untroubled by doubts and questions that afflict others. Oblivious to the pain and probing of other truth-seekers, this member is secure in his or her ability to understand all religious issues.

Although some Mormons may live comfortably close to the unruffled ideal, the majority find themselves unable to achieve and sustain this serenity (the number is thought to be as high as 80% of those baptized worldwide sometime during their lifetimes). Attempts to fit the unruffled mold can create a number of problems. For example, those who repress their natural urge to question, so they can maintain an unruffled image, may settle for appearing to have knowledge in place of actual conviction (e.g., the "closet doubter"). Over a period of time, such self-deception can create emotional conflict and foster feelings of guilt and hypocrisy. They may confide, "I'm living a lie. What's wrong with me? I can't live up to the expectations of others. I feel so guilty; the Lord must hate me." Others struggling for surety are

often caught in an endless cycle of attempts and failures to achieve the perceived perfection of the unruffled state. These defeats can result in feelings of frustration, discouragement, unworthiness, or low self esteem: "I've prayed and fasted, but I still have questions. Why don't I get the same answers as others? I just can't accept a calling while I have these nagging doubts. I don't deserve blessings because I have uncertainties and questions inside."

Members with unresolved doubts may also experience marital conflicts, denial of reality, reduced ability to deal with feelings and emotions, reduced motivation to learn, and feelings of disorientation: "My wife keeps saying, 'Why can't you just believe? Why do you have to question everything?' She thinks I'm not trying, that I'm somehow unworthy of the blessings of a sure knowledge. Why can't she just understand that's the way I am?"

As Hettinger suggests, members desiring to discuss their questions and doubts often find communication difficult or impossible. And when there is no chance to talk with others, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual growth suffer. Such members can feel alienated from the religious community, either through emotional withdrawal or actual decrease in church activity: "If I can't have the same assurance as others, I don't want to participate. I can't talk to anybody about this. If it weren't for the kids (my parents, my wife, my husband), I'd just quit it all."

We know the problem. The question is what to do about it. As they say, all religion is local. Suppose readers of *Dialogue* simply stood up in testimony meeting and told the bald truth about their searching, doubts, struggles, and willingness to live by faith. Would it

make a difference? Ten years ago, speaking in our Sacrament meeting, I stated simply (in my closing "testimony") that I didn't know anything for sure, that I was skeptical about some aspects of Mormonism, that I hoped for the best, and that I supported the church and lived the gospel on the basis of faith. Some people in my ward still mention that talk. And it opened an avenue for a few to express their true feelings and beliefs (if only to me).

If we—who understand the problem—don't do it, who will?

D. Jeff Burton, author,
For Those Who Wonder
Bountiful, Utah

Faithful Doubt

Glenn J. Hettinger regrets that there's no room for faith anymore (Winter 1999). Faith isn't good enough. We have to *know* the gospel is true, etc. Personally I think Mormons use faith in at least two different contexts: (1) they have faith that the gospel is true, and (2) they have faith that God answers their prayers. So faith can be belief or confidence.

My own experience is that Mormons use faith to beef up low probabilities (such as the assumptions in (1) and (2) above, for example). Of course, with respect to faith as confidence, there are many secular examples. For instance, Randy Cross says that in the 49er huddles of the 1982 Super Bowl—during that famous last drive down the field—quarterback Joe Montana would say to his team, in stirring tones—"Believe! Believe!" And Joe finally found John Taylor in the end zone with the winning touchdown

pass. The odds were probably with the Bengals during that final drive—but not by much.

What are the odds that there is a Mormon heaven? When I was a student at Stanford, I attended a Sunday service in their chapel to hear revered theologian Paul Tillich speak. The sermon was on “hope,” and he distinguished between “true hope” and “false hope”—examples: True hope is a boy’s anticipating that he will grow up to be a man. False hope is thinking you are going to heaven. (The sermon was not delivered in a Mormon chapel, of course.)

In his essay, “The Will to Believe,” Harvard pragmatist William James said that if it *helps* you to believe your religion, then *believe* it. And British philosopher Bertrand Russell, making fun of this suggestion, said (in his *History of Western Philosophy*) that he had always wanted to meet a man named Ebenezer Wilkes Smith. On a train he

saw a man walking toward him, down the aisle, and Russell called out, saying, “Ebenezer Wilkes Smith!” But it turned out that this was not the man’s name even though Russell had wanted it to be. (If you don’t understand Russell’s point, there’s no hope for you.)

Let’s move to Tillich’s definition of “faith”—*ultimate concern*. If you’re really caught up in something, then you’re faithful to it. Notice what happens to “doubt” in this definition: whereas in normal Christian parlance a doubt is the negation of faith (faith being something like “belief”), under Tillich’s construction, a profound doubter could be very faithful—the profundity of his doubt being part of the depth of his ultimate concern.

Oh never mind. . . . Go back to sleep.

Joseph Jeppson
WOODSIDE, CALIFORNIA