

Under One Cover

Your last issue (Vol. 34, No. 1&2) was great. Even though many of the articles you included in the issue can be found easily on CD, it was great having those landmark writings in one issue.

Greg Oman
Bountiful, Utah

Sins of Omission

I have read with interest your introduction to the Commemorative Issue of *Dialogue* (Vol. 34, No. 1&2), celebrating its thirty-five years of vigorous exchanges and expressions among the Mormons and honoring many of the best writers and thinkers. It is nice to have within one volume so many landmark articles and to have the opportunity to relive the impressions they made when they first appeared. Gary Bergera is to be congratulated on what must have been a most difficult task of selection.

You state in your Introduction that such a collection will not satisfy everyone's idea of what has been most important over this third of a century, and this is certainly true in my case. As much as I like the collection (and it would be difficult to decide what to omit from it to make room for some of my choices), I feel it has two glaring omissions—anything by Eugene England, the guiding force of Mormon thought since he helped establish the journal in 1966; and anything of an artistic nature.

In regard to Gene, I can think of many of his pieces that could have been included: "The Possibility of Dialogue: A Personal View," which set the tone for the journal in its first issue, "Are Mormons Christians?" "Blessing the Chevrolet," "Great Books or True Religion? Defining the Mormon Scholar," and "On Fidelity, Polygamy and Celestial Marriage" (which is as much a challenge to Mormon orthodoxy as any of the articles you include). Of course you are devoting a future issue to Gene (see Vol. 35, No. 1), which will be a wonderful tribute to the long light with which he illuminated the work of the journal, but something by him in this collection would have been nice. My personal choice would have been "Blessing the Chevrolet."

Which brings me to my second lament about the collection—the total absence of art, poetry, drama, fiction, scriptural exegesis, literary criticism, and, with a couple of exceptions, personal essays. What I have in mind is such things as Thomas Asplund's "The Heart of My Father," Lowell Bennion's "Carrying Water on Both Shoulders," Wayne Booth's "Art and the Church," Edward Geary's "The Last Days of the Coleville Tabernacle," Karl Keller's "Every Soul Has Its South," Carol C. Hansen's "The Death of a Son," and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's "Poor Mother"; Bruce Jorgenson's literary criticism; poetry by Robert Christmas, Mary Bradford, Emma Lou Thayne, Karl Sandberg, Linda Sillitoe, Iris Parker Corry, Edward Hart, Clinton Larson, Arthur Henry King, Ronald Wilcox, Timothy Liu, Holly Welker,

and others; fiction by Douglas Thayer, Karen Rosenbaum, Levi Peterson, Brian Evanson, and Michael Fillerup; and art and graphic design of such artists as Trevor Southey, David Willardson, and Kim Whitesides. Such a list is not meant to be definitive but suggestive. It may not be apparent to some *Dialogue* readers that such expressive works represent as much of a contribution to the growth of Mormon culture as historical and doctrinal articles, but in their own way they have been as much a challenge to certain entrenched ideologies as are the expository pieces you include. What is surprising is that you make the case for such expressions in your discussion of mythos and logos and yet your selections almost all come down on the side of logos—thoughtful, rational expositions about Mormon thought and doctrine—at the expense of mythos—imaginative explorations into the lived essence of Mormon culture, those pieces that you identify in your editorial introduction as “stories, histories, and images that address deep emotional and psychological needs.” More than the discursive discussions you include, these “tell us something about the meaning of lives, their ultimate promise and obligation, the way they ought from an eternal perspective to be lived.” Many of these expressions have also had “watershed significance.” As you note, “we can[not] obviate. . .the human need for mythic kinds of knowledge.”

It would be nice if for its fortieth anniversary issue *Dialogue* would issue a volume commemorating the more imaginative expressions that have graced its pages from the beginning. As you note—and as I note in a forthcoming essay on Joseph Smith and the American Renaissance (See *Dialogue* Vol. 35, No. 3)—we need both logos

and mythos to make meaning out of the world.

Robert A. Rees
Brookdale, California

Poet to Poet

I do not know if you allow poetic response to published poetry. The following is my comment to the poem “Love is a delicate chain of moments” by Marilyn Bushman-Carlton published in (Vol. 34, No. 3&4) Fall/Winter 2001, page 165.

A Response To “Love is a delicate chain of moments”

Love laughs at moments set in stone
like buttons seen as love full grown.
It is not what was pictured here
that makes the absent one so dear.

But rather gaps between the day
when love becomes the only way
to make, from moments long since past,
a memory that never lasts

the loss is all there is.

Paul M. Edwards
Independence, Missouri

Christianizing the LDS Church

Please accept our deepest gratitude for the publication of Keith Norman’s fine article “Taking Up the Cross” (Vol. 34, No. 3&4). It lucidly reflects our sentiments about the LDS church’s reluctance to become identified with the widely accepted Christian symbols and rituals. We are aware of the recent changes in several areas that

the church is making to become more readily identified as Christian, such as the changed name emphasis, and the emphasis in church publications more on Christ than Joseph Smith.

Dr. Norman's article expressed our similar thoughts written in a letter to Elder Dallin Oaks which we sent a year or so ago. We expressed in it our hope that "if we increasingly observed the Christian calendar" and "designed [LDS chapels] to look more like sanctuaries, places of worship, rather than mere meeting rooms," people of other faiths would "think of us as fellow members of the Christian community, not members of some erratic 'cult.'"

Thank you for your increasingly important journal. We learn much and receive much joy in reading each issue.

Monroe and Shirley Paxman
Provo, Utah

The "Mormon" Cross

Thanks for publishing Keith Norman's reflections on "Taking Up the Cross" (Vol. 34, No. 3&4). Topics such as the cross and Holy Week clearly show the tensions in a religion that insists on being both Christian *and* peculiar. Although Holy Week has been the object of some enlightened discussions in several Mormon forums (Rees, Sunstone Symposium, 2001, session 264; and Austin *Dialogue*, Vol. 28, No. 4), it does remain alien to Mormon culture, and probably most of us have had the experience at one time or another of attending an Easter Sunday sacrament service where Christ's resurrection was not even mentioned.

The question of the cross as a Mormon symbol is even more intriguing.

Mentioned both in the Book of Mormon and in the Doctrine & Covenants, the cross was rejected early on as Joseph Smith appropriated and developed more idiosyncratic symbols (such as the clasped hands and the all-seeing eye) which, as shown by Allen D. Roberts, were also eventually discarded (*Sunstone*, May 1985). And yet the cross has sometimes reappeared in the places one would least expect it; B. H. Roberts' grave in Centerville, for instance, is adorned with a massive marble cross purchased by the missionaries who served under his direction in the Eastern States Mission. Unlike other religious movements, which often display crucifixes and invite their members to "come to the cross," Mormons are asked only to "endure," "suffer," and "take up" the cross (e.g. 2 Nephi 9:18, Jacob 1:8, and D&C 23:6). For Mormons the cross has usually been a symbol of personal suffering. Robert Rees, for instance, has encouraged single Mormons to "bear their sexual cross gracefully" (*Dialogue*, Vol. 24, No. 4), and Eugene England has stated that the ban on Blacks holding the priesthood was a cross all Mormons had to bear (*Dialogue* Vol. 8, No. 1).

What might the future hold for the cross in Mormonism? The Mormon replica of Thorvaldsen's *Christus*, now prominently displayed on the LDS official website, seems to have recently replaced all other symbols of our faith—even the Angel Moroni. As LDS leaders try harder than ever to present Mormonism as Christian, will they ever dare to reclaim the most universal symbol of the atonement, or will the cross remain only a symbol of personal suffering?

Hugo Olaiz
Salt Lake City, Utah

Which "Abomination" is Yours?

G. Kevin Jones (who I believe was a member of an LDS Gospel doctrine class I once taught) made a good suggestion in *Dialogue*, Fall-Winter 2001. He said I should have included "the most important historical documents, the scriptures" in my article about the LDS church's campaign against same-sex marriage. To support his statement that the "scriptures specifically condemn homosexuality," he first quoted from the Law of Moses the following: "Thou shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18:22).

To be sure that we're talking about the same Hebrew word when we cite references to "abomination" in the King James Version, I consulted Robert Young's *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22nd American edition, pages 6-7. All these "Old Testament" references to "abomination" in the KJV translate the Hebrew word *toebah*, a term that has the same meaning in each usage.

Consider that it is *toebah* (translated as "abominable thing") to eat pork ("swine") or seafood without "fins and scales" (Deut. 14:3, 7-8, also Lev. 11:10-12). It is also "abomination" (*toebah*) when a woman wears "that which pertaineth unto a man" or when a man wears "a woman's garment" (Deut. 22:5). It is "abomination" for a man to remarry a wife he has previously divorced, if she was widowed or divorced by her next husband (Deut. 24:4). It is "abomination" to carve or sculpt "any" image of a human or animal, even if it is not used for worship (Deut. 27:15). It is also "abomination" (*toebah*) to have "a proud look" (Proverbs 6:16-17) or to be "proud in heart" (Proverbs 16:5).

The Apostle Paul insisted that if you have violated one commandment

of the Law of Moses, you are guilty of violating all of its commandments (James 2:10). An official editorial in the LDS church's newspaper on 11 February 1996 also insisted: "homosexual activities and practices are an abomination, not just some 'alternative lifestyle' no better or worse than others." But in the Hebrew Bible, one "abomination" is also "no better or worse than others."

Therefore, it as an "abomination" as serious as a man having sex with "mankind" if a biblical literalist has ever eaten bacon, shrimp, lobster, a ham sandwich, or a sausage pizza. It is an "abomination" of equal gravity if a female has ever worn bluejeans designed for males. It is an "abomination" as serious as male-male sex if a woman has borrowed her husband's shirt or if a male has put his coat around the shoulders of a female who was chilled by the weather. It is the same "abomination" if a male has ever put on a dress for a comic "drag show" in school, in the military, or in an old-time LDS "roadshow."

It is an "abomination" for children to pray that their divorced parents will remarry after their mother has been widowed or divorced by her second husband, and it is an "abomination" if their divorced parents do remarry. Therefore, according to the Law of Moses, it has been an "abomination" for any LDS official to solemnize the remarriage of a previously divorced couple, where the wife had been temporarily married to another man. Likewise, biblical literalists insist that it has been an "abomination" every time a Protestant minister or Jewish rabbi has solemnized a same-sex marriage in recent years.

According to God's ancient commandment (which was not specifically changed in the New Testament or LDS revelations), it has also been an "abom-

ination" as serious as male-male intercourse for Mormon artists to sculpt the statues of Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, and the Handcart Pioneers on Temple Square in Salt Lake City. In the context of the Law of Moses, the adjacent Seagull Monument is "an abomination" because it invites religious veneration of a carved animal. Because it is sculpted in human form, the statue of the Angel Moroni is an "abomination" towering over LDS temples. Those applications of Deuteronomy are as legitimate as its current use for condemning homosexuality.

And for all biblical literalists, you have committed a secret "abomination" as serious as male-male intercourse if you have ever felt pride in your heart about an achievement in your life. You were guilty of "abomination" if you have ever had "a proud look" when being congratulated for something.

Which "abomination" is yours? According to the New Testament, each of these violations of the Law of Moses is as serious as any of them. Committing one "abomination" listed in the Hebrew Bible is as serious as committing all of these abominations combined. Remember this whenever someone quotes Leviticus or Deuteronomy to claim that "scriptures specifically condemn homosexuality."

D. Michael Quinn
New Haven, Connecticut

Issue Excessive

I am a fairly recent subscriber to *Dialogue*, having been introduced to it by a long time subscriber who generously has allowed me to read old copies.

Your Spring/Summer Thirty-Fifth Anniversary issue was truly fascinat-

ing; however, the current issue, Spring 2002 was a great disappointment. While I am certain that Eugene England was a gifted and talented man, to devote virtually one issue to him seems excessive. My interest in *Dialogue* is the provocative, informative, and challenging articles I have read in the past, not an issue devoted almost entirely to one contemporary individual.

I have a feeling that Eugene England would not have approved of giving this much valuable print space to one individual, himself in particular.

John D. Van der Waal
Prescott, Arizona

Issue Superb

From his place on high, Eugene England looks down on the journal he helped create and sings, "It is good."

The England memorial issue is superb—from its imaginative, poignant cover art, to Clifton Jolley's anguished grief cry. The poetry, the speeches, the articles, the reprints are all mirrors of Gene's genius. Thanks too for all the Virginia Sorensen papers.

Mary L. Bradford
Leesburg, Virginia

The Mathematics of Miracles

In his letter to the editor ("The Problem of Miracles," Vol. 35, No. 1, v-vi), Timothy Griffy decries the apparent arbitrariness of miracles. Specifically, he states, ". . . if God is rational, then we could probably discern such a pattern with miracles. This is certainly not the case. . . miracles, if they occur, seem to be utterly random." (iii)

I for one believe that God is both rational and constant and, therefore, predictable in his behavior. Primitive man no doubt found only chaos in oceanic tides and lunar cycles—we now understand the laws that govern and relate those two phenomena. Similarly, the challenge with miracles lies in delineating the criteria upon which God dispenses his favors. After some reflection, I believe it is possible to employ the statistics of gaming theories to predict the probability of a miracle. Just as in rolling dice or playing blackjack, the chances of achieving a positive outcome are greatly enhanced when the rules of the game are understood. I propose that miracles, too, follow the basic concepts of what is known in mathematics as heuristics and the frequency theory. Consider the following formula:

$$p(M) = \frac{w(I) e(I) T}{d(M)}$$

$p(M)$ represents the probability of a miracle occurring and has a maximum value of 1.0. In other words, if $p(M)$ equals 1, then the miracle will certainly come to pass. If $p(M)$ is 0.5, then the chance of the miracle is about the same as correctly calling the toss of a coin. If $p(M)$ is less than 0.001, then the chance of the miracle is remote indeed.

Now consider the numerators. $w(I)$ refers to the worthiness of the individual involved and has a maximum value of 1.0. The scriptures show that God favors those who live pious lives. Daniel praying in the lions' den is miraculously preserved; despite his fervent supplications for God's help, Korihor meets a miserable end.

$e(I)$ reflects the efforts of the individual involved and again has a maximum value of 1.0. A well-known maxim in the church states that we should pray as if everything depended on God, but work as if everything depended on us. God will not grant miracles without expecting some sacrifice in return.

T represents time, maximum value of 1.0, referring to the cosmic cycle. All millennia are not created equal. Miracles were abundant during Jesus' earthly ministry and will be plentiful again in the last days. If, however, you lived during the Neolithic period, your chances of miraculously outrunning a saber-toothed tiger were slim indeed.

The denominator is also of significance. $d(M)$ reflects the difficulty of a miracle and has a minimum value of 1.0, with no maximum value. (A value of 1.0 would indicate the chance of a set outcome without any divine intervention.) The math then supports the observation that while simple miracles are common, complex miracles are less so. By way of example, God is more likely to banish the vague aches of arthritis ($d(M)$ of close to 1.0) than he is to regrow a severed limb. $d(M)$ for this latter case is apparently infinite, as no documented cases exist.¹ $d(M)$ can also refer to the method that God employs to achieve his miracle. In an example culled from a recent issue of *Dialogue*, if your car breaks down while doing the Lord's work, he is more likely to lead you to a good mechanic than he is to carry you to your destination aloft on the wings of angels.²

Let's test the formula with some real life examples. A recently returned

1. For a more in-depth discussion of this problem, see Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 234-236.

2. Eugene England, "Blessing the Chevrolet," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2002):37-41.

missionary with a $w(I)$ value of 0.94 (based on church attendance, frequency of prayers, etc.) sincerely desires to acquire a wife—the one special soul mate with whom he covenanted in the pre-existence. He goes to BYU and dates a different girl every day of the week, for an $e(I)$ score of 0.99. The value for T is difficult to estimate, but exhortations from various church leaders indicate we are in the Latter Days (c.f. the most recent official name of the church), so let's say that T equals 0.97. Finding a spouse at BYU even for the uninspired is not terribly arduous; $d(M)$ for this case is 1.01. Plugging the numbers into the formula, we find that $p(M)$, the probability of our missionary meeting his miracle girl, is 89 per cent. Any Vegas regular would gladly take those odds and usually win, as the number of bridal shops in the Provo/Orem area clearly attests.

A second example: let's say Illinois Governor Thomas Ford (whose nefarious deeds earn him a $w(I)$ of 0.05), while dying of tuberculosis in 1850 (say

a T value of around 0.85^3), sits at home ($e(I)$ equals 0.1) and prays for a miracle cure. Though it is now possible to successfully treat TB, in Ford's day antibiotics had not been discovered, so $d(M)$ in his case equals about 5. Doing the math, $p(M)$ for this long standing foe of Mormonism is 0.00085. And indeed, Ford is dead and buried.

Bruce R. McConkie observed that, "All things are governed by law; nothing is exempt. . . . Once a law has been ordained, it therefore operates automatically; that is, whenever there is compliance with its terms and conditions, the promised results accrue."⁴ I have attempted mathematically to clarify the seeming randomness behind miracles. Time and experience will no doubt show that there are other factors that influence the equation. I believe that, when all is revealed, we will see that there is no arbitrariness at all to God—he simply operates by an arcane set of rules.

Robert Patterson
Roosevelt, Utah

3. Some might argue that the year 1850 deserves as high a T value as 2002. While many miracles were performed in the early church during the active phase of the restoration of the Gospel, the charismatic nature of the church changed dramatically after the death of Joseph Smith in 1847. In fact, some doubted Brigham Young's claim to leadership because he did not possess the same credentials as Smith. See John Quist, "John E. Page: Apostle of Uncertainty," *Mormon Mavericks*, eds. John Sillito and Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 24.

4. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 433.