

Coming Out

I am certainly enjoying the current issue of *Dialogue*, especially Dynette Reynold's piece, "Coming out of the Evolution Closet" (Vol. 35, No. 4). As a retired biology teacher—I taught in the high school whose attendance area includes Ms. Reynolds' Ogden 40th Ward—I have endured some of the same frustrations which she has. When I taught the unit on evolution in my biology classes, I always told my students that I believed in theistic evolution, i.e. that God somehow guided the evolution of species and especially that of man by zapping the genes and causing the right mutations that brought it about. This wasn't good enough for the brethren across the street who taught seminary to my students. Even when I was second counselor in my ward bishopric, my students were told that I was in danger of losing my testimony.

More recently I had to endure a lesson from the Priesthood/Relief Society manual which had a paragraph against evolution. I sat silently as the teacher, a brother whom I home teach, expressed his disbelief in evolution, and he was followed by several others who added similar thoughts. "It is only a theory," one of them said.

Ms. Reynolds' coming out of the evolution closet has outed me. No longer will I sit silently and bite my tongue. I hope that I don't have an outburst as she did, but I have a speech prepared. If she is really interested in

starting a support group, I would like to be one of the charter members.

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Spreading Zion Southward?

I saved the Winter 2002 issue (Vol 35, Nr. 4) to read during my vacation. By some strange twist of fate, and from my perspective maybe the ultimate irony, I was sitting and reading on the balcony of a hotel in Ouro Preto, Brazil, overlooking the city early one morning while the family slept. It was here that I read the article by Bradley Walker, "Spreading Zion Southward, Part I: Improving Efficiency and Equity in the Allocation of Church Welfare Resources." We had traveled to Brazil to collect our daughter, who had been serving her mission in Belo Horizonte. We had been traveling throughout our daughter's mission, delivering food and clothing, which we brought in two large duffel bags from Virginia. We took these things to the poorest of the poor Saints in the areas where she worked. It was for us a small thing but for them a miracle. As we drove away from one family, a single sister with five small children living in a "house" with no electricity, running water, sanitation, or even windows (etc.), my wife initiated a discussion on what the church does in such cases to help the welfare of these people. I gave the standard answer: not much, given the

difficulty of administration, “welfare baptisms,” and unlimited demands on resources. Both of us concluded that we should do more.

It was with great interest and this new perspective that I read Dr. Walker’s article. Unfortunately, I could not share even the smallest part of the optimism he tries to project. His estimation of \$33 million for basic interventions is probably five times to little. Anytime services are subsidized, demand increases significantly. Administration of the program he describes, while simple on paper, would be a practical nightmare. Volunteer organizations are notoriously inefficient, poorly managed, and have difficulty sustaining programs even when beneficial (cf., LDS church, Boy Scouts of America, the free clinic where I work, Deseret Industries, etc.). Based on our visits with local leaders in Brazil, I do not believe they have the training or capacity to administer a medical or food program other than the distribution of packages. I did truly enjoy Walker’s discussion of the historical impact of our rejection of public welfare and of its possibly detrimental effects on church welfare services.

Finally, I felt left out, in as much as there were references to missionaries who had served in an area and come back to aid the destitute families there. Specifically, I am referring to a “charitable foundation consisting of ex-missionaries” referred to as the “missionaries who worked here.” I believe *all of us would extend a helping hand* to these poorest of poor members if we knew how effectively to do so. I freely admit, however, that I do not have the energy, the time, or commitment to initiate such a program outside of the existing organizations. I do not believe the institutional church does either. So the question looms, does anyone out there

have this desire. I’d be happy to help. Are there enough interested Saints with training in administration, nutrition, medicine, local politics, and languages to start an independent charitable organization to directly benefit the Saints in these areas? How do we meet and explore the possibilities?

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Errors of Men

If one believes that Latter-day Saints approach Joseph Smith’s translation of the Book of Mormon as inerrant, as Richard Packham (*Translated Correctly*, “Letters,” Vol. 36, No. 1) seems to, I wonder if that person has actually read the Book of Mormon. It is full of references to “the errors of men”, and Joseph Smith’s introductory material also makes such references. As it happens, there is a very good modern example of the kind of translation of cardinal directions Packham thinks is in error, “good” in the sense that if you were to force those who use it to use a (Phoenix, Salt Lake City, or Calgary) North-South/East-West grid, they would be confused: and that is the roughly 15 million people who live in the St. Lawrence Lowlands. From Hamilton, ON, to Quebec City, QC, and also up the Ottawa River valley, most roads and directions are oriented to the St. Lawrence River as if the river flowed from west to east, when in fact it flows from the southwest to the northeast. Thus, to get to the temple in Brampton from downtown Toronto, you will be told to go northwest, on a map it is more west than northwest. Likewise most English-speaking suburbs of Montreal are on “West Island”,

which is southwest of the City of Montreal, not west at all.

There are many other examples of this. Seattle is one: the downtown core is oriented at a 45° angle to the meridians and latitudes, whereas other parts of the city are orthogonal. We have to ask: is a “good” translation one which fits arbitrary modern Aristotelian notions of what is right, notions of a few people of rigid understanding, or is it meant to fit the linguistic box of the writers and/or translators? We would look in vain for unicorns and leviathans in ancient Palestine, but will find them in Jacobean era literature. But that’s the Bible. Fine. However, Mr. Packham’s other example—deer versus horse—also has a precedent, in several ways. First of all, our English word for “deer” is a narrowing of the original word, “Thier” (cf. modern German “Tier”), which means animal in general. As Low Germans, primarily Northern Germanic peoples, used the deer, especially the reindeer, as their primary animal of burden and food, the meaning likewise became constricted. This is a very common phenomenon that one sees in historical linguistics.

Perhaps the Nephite redactors did not know what the Jaredite “curelom” was, and that could be why we see non-translateable terms alone in Ether. In the new world, liquor made from a type of cactus, which we would call tequila today, was called by the early Spanish, “wine” (to use the English word), and the bison are still called by us with the old-world term “buffalo.” The next time Mr. Packham visits a national park where there are North American plains or woodlands bison

present, he might want to correct the warden and insist that they not be called buffalo. Bring a marking pen and correct the signs. And if he should visit Canadian Arctic regions (as opposed to Alaska), one hopes he knows better than to call the Inuit “Eskimos” or he might be fed to the seals. Or sea lions, I can never remember which.

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Other Standards

Regarding the qualifications for the new editors of *Dialogue* (*Minimum Requirement*, “Letters,” Vol. 36, no. 1): during the six years I served as managing editor (under Martha Sonntag Bradley and Allen Dale Roberts), I found that what helped most was an on-going commitment to the highest quality scholarship and writing, to thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion, to meeting deadlines, and especially to an abundance of civility, good-will, and patience. Active participation in the church never compensated for an inability or unwillingness to meet the above objectives. I don’t doubt that an abiding affinity for Mormonism—its culture, history, people, religion, and society—has its place. But I don’t agree that participation (or even membership) in the church is a necessary requirement to produce *Dialogue*.

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