

Notes and Comments

Edited by Joseph Jeppson

Notes and comments are not merely short articles or long letters; they are varied, informal glimpses of Mormon thought and life. The Editors welcome news, profiles, opinions, accounts, speeches and other items that seem appropriate.

Concerned inquiries have reached me regarding the nature of certain brilliant and inspired articles which I previously reported had been rejected by all the other members of the staff of this journal. In every instance these articles were written by me. They concerned Mormon history, L.D.S. theology, and Mormons and civil rights and were respectively entitled "The Uncovered Wagon," "Questions to Gospel Answers," and "A Marvelous Shirk and a Blunder."

ON MORMON THEOLOGY

Sterling M. McMurrin, Provost and E. E. Ericksen Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah, has written the following note in response to the Roundtable in the Spring issue, which reviewed his The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion.

Professors Brown, Bennett, and Anderson were most gracious in giving attention to my essays on Mormon theology and were both generous and helpful in their comments. I am pleased that Professor Brown sees the essays as a step toward serious discussion between Mormons and non-Mormons, that Professor Bennett correctly observed that the essays were not an argument that Mormon theology is true, and that Professor Anderson appears to agree with my thesis that Mormon theology is grounded in a positive conception of man. I especially appreciate the fine ecumenic spirit of Professor Brown's comments, though I must frankly confess that he attributes to me a motive more lofty than the facts justify. My motive was simply to describe comparatively the distinctive character of Mormon theology, though I hoped in doing so to show that Mormonism has more intellectual strength than most of its critics suppose and than most of its adherents seem willing to admit.

It is true that in Mormonism certain philosophical concepts function very importantly, but I should not have conveyed the impression, to quote Professor Brown, "that Mormonism is a highly intricate and subtle philosophical system." Viewed from the standpoint which Professor Anderson recommends in his emphasis upon scripture and revelation, Mormonism is highly dogmatic and authoritarian, though it has traditionally made an admirable effort to be reasonable. I intended to give only a partial description of Mormon theology, getting at the basic ideas, but I had not supposed that this would produce distorted conceptions of the religion.

It seems to me that Brown and Anderson both assume that in these essays I am expressing my own theological views. I made no attempt to stay out of the picture, and I have no illusions about the possibility of genuine objectivity. And in the supplementary essay on the idea that God is a person, which is not specifically about Mormon theology, I definitely got into the act. But I would like to make it clear that, whatever judgments were made along the way, my interest was simply in giving a description of Mormon theology. Professor Brown is quite sure that I must belong to the "liberal wing" of Mormonism. My Mormon attachments are very genuine, but my personal views incline toward naturalistic humanism with some flavor of positivism. Mormon liberalism, which showed some life in the thirties, never quite made the grade. The liberals talked a great deal, but they had no courage of decision or action. Their sentiments always got in their way. They are still around, but in influence they have been displaced by a breed of noisy and deceptive irrationalists who give the appearance of orthodoxy while denying its spirit.

Professor Brown raises the question, "Does Professor McMurrin speak for what might be called 'normative' Mormonism?" The answer to this is a simple "No." I have here spoken for no one — not even for myself if this means expressing my personal religious views. I have attempted, however, to describe the basic facets of what I would regard as "normative Mormonism." To Professor Brown's question, How would one "determine the content of 'normative Mormonism?'" I would say, "In the same way by which one would determine the content of normative Protestantism." Whether I have described normative Mormonism reliably, I must leave to others to judge. But I should say to Professor Brown that it is just as obvious that the denial of original sin, for instance, is a characteristic of normative Mormonism as that Paul, Augustine, and Luther belong to the mainstream of Christianity.

Professor Brown asks such questions as by what criterion I am able to say that earlier generations of Mormons exhibited greater intellectual acumen than do their present successors. This seems to me to be in principle a strange question. Something like my asking for the criterion on which he grounds his statement that Schleiermacher is "one of the seminal thinkers of recent Protestant history." Just as his statement is supported by what he regards as seminal thought taken together with his estimate of Schleiermacher, in my case it is simply a matter of what I regard to be good intellectual acumen taken together with my estimate of certain Mormon writers. At one point Professor Brown seems to confuse the question of who is the ecclesiastical authority in Mormonism with the question of who has the competence to comment responsibly on the character of Mormonism. This is a very strange confusion. There is no problem of determining where the ecclesiastical

authority resides. It is in the hierarchy, and ultimately in the President of the Church. But to speak *for* Mormonism is one thing. To speak *about* it is something else.

Professor Brown's complaint that some of my generalizations are too sweeping is well taken. I should say, perhaps, that I did not intend them to be taken as sweepingly as he has apparently done, but I appreciate his criticism. It is true that my theological foil was fundamentalistic Protestantism, but not conceived narrowly, as Professor Brown suggests. Though all too brief and sketchy, my descriptions were based especially on the greatest of the theologians, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, and on the major creeds. Though this is only a part of the story of Protestantism, it is the part that is important if a person is to understand Mormonism. I used fundamentalism as a foil not arbitrarily but because in fact it was the actual foil of the historical rise and growth of Mormonism. Mormonism is fundamentalism turned against itself.

I have no desire to contend with Professor Brown over which is the central dogma of traditional Christian orthodoxy. I certainly respect his opinion. He says "grace" and I say "original sin." My point is simply that the grace is necessary for salvation because of the sin, which gives the latter some logical priority. I would not accuse Calvin and Luther of revelling in man's vileness, to paraphrase Professor Brown, but as theologians and ecclesiastics they were probably rather grateful for it. Each had an inordinate preoccupation with the issue of sin. Chesterton may have found the good news of grace in the doctrine of original sin, but this hardly changes the fact that original sin is bad news to begin with. He simply made the best of a bad situation. I suspect that I can see Professor Brown's own liberalism shining through this discussion. But Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, whatever their virtues, were not liberals in their theologies. I here exhibit my distaste for the dogma of original sin, of course, but I can assure Professor Brown that my essays were written not around my personal views in this matter, but rather to describe the belief of the generality of Mormons and their theologians. I personally believe that Mormonism, like most liberalism, has been quite superficial in its treatment of the problem of sin. Mormonism has been plagued at this point with an excessive legalism and with a superficial optimism in its estimate of man and its conception of human history. Moreover, it has usually managed to misunderstand the traditional concept of original sin and few Mormon writers have any acquaintance with the psychological subtleties that have surrounded the discussion of that doctrine in recent decades.

And the matter of the privative conception of evil. I agree that no one can describe evil more positively than Augustine. He knew it at first hand. But the point is what happens when he and others attempt to *explain* its reality. My discussion of evil had to do with the problem of theodicy. I could have approached the subject on the broader base which Professor Brown proposes, but this would not change the fact that for classical theology evil, while often *described* as if it were positive, has more often than not been *explained* as negative.

Professor Brown remarks on the absence from the essays of any discussion of revelation and authority. His point here is well taken. This will come in a piece on the Mormon religion if I can ever get around to it. He quite graciously suggests a future Protestant-Mormon dialogue on such issues. On

the concept of revelation he would find much confusion in Mormon literature and discussion. Most Mormons are not even aware that there are others today who believe in revelation. Though they talk much about it and declare their belief in it, the Mormons do not have a clear and articulate doctrine of revelation. But they are themselves an impressive exhibit of a people who were once moved, and moved profoundly and dramatically — even tragically and heroically — by what they heard as the word of God. Today, engrossed in the prosperity and conservative respectability against which their own prophets warned, and anxious for the condition of their own faith, they engage in a loud and excited conversation among themselves and no longer listen for the voice of God.

On the matter of authority, the Mormon views, like the Mormon institutions, are better organized. But here again is the exhibit — the tragic exhibit — of a vital, prophetic, free religion come all too soon, even prematurely, to its churchly form, deceived by an authoritarianism that has destroyed much of the adventure, vitality, and creativity of its people, a religion that now stands certainly as the strangest American anachronism — an authoritarian religion and rigidly authoritarian church born and nourished in the land of the free.

I appreciate Professor Bennett's warning to my readers that I did not intend to convey the notion that the "theological foundations of Mormonism are philosophically sound." My intention was to describe the foundations. Whether they are or are not sound is another story. In my opinion, Mormonism has far more intellectual strength than is commonly supposed, even by most Mormons. I frankly wanted to exhibit that strength, just to set the record straight — not to argue for or against the truth of the doctrines. It may be, for instance, that the finitistic conception of God is not true. But that this idea can be forcefully set against an absolutistic conception is of importance for any theological discussion that rises above the level of tradition and sentimentality.

I have found Bennett's discussion of analysis in theology very rewarding. My own inclination at this point, however, is to favor logical over linguistic analysis as providing a better access to the question of whether theology is meaningful. I have already confessed to something of a positivistic bias. I suspect that most metaphysical and theological discourse has been meaningless if empirical criteria are to be respected. But I am not ready to say that it is not possible to construct a meaningful statement in theology, or that the Christian theologians have not done so.

As a sample of the problem of the source of theological knowledge, Bennett asks, "But how do we get our knowledge of the eternal intelligences of Mormon theology?" Most Mormons would say, no doubt, "By revelation." My answer, of course, is that this is a simple instance of dogmatic speculation and I suppose that there is not the remotest possibility of any empirical evidence bearing upon its truth or falsity. It may be a meaningless concept. Now some may ask how I could write about concepts which I believe may be meaningless. But as Bennett has pointed out, I was writing about the Mormon beliefs about God and the soul — not whether these beliefs are meaningful or true. Certainly they are not less likely to be meaningful than the concepts of the classical theism. The strong physioalistic propensities of Mormon theology might even find favor with some positivists — at the point of meaningfulness, not of truth.

Since Professor Anderson and I are on less common ground, I am sensitive to his generosity toward my essays. I doubt that I would have been as gracious in commenting on his position. He describes me as following the tradition of B. H. Roberts. I don't see myself as belonging in any particular tradition, but, as my essays indicated, I have much admiration for Roberts's intellectual strength and integrity. Mormonism has had no theologian of the first order and there is none on the horizon. But the Mormons have an avid if undiscriminating taste for theology, and in the past their theologians played a major role in their lives. Of these, Roberts was far and away the most forceful and talented and the one who most effectively grasped and articulated what can be called the living spirit of Mormonism. His death in 1933 marked the beginning of a severe decline in the intellectual quality of the Mormon religion, a decline from which it has not even begun to recover.

I have the impression that Professor Anderson agrees with most of my description of the Mormon conceptions of God and man, though at certain points we may be farther apart than his comments would suggest. I see no point in commenting on our large areas of agreement except to say that I am pleased by them. A few observations on our differences may be of interest.

If I understand Professor Anderson correctly, I am disappointed that he apparently finds no meaning for Mormonism in the problem of universals. Assuming the cognitive legitimacy of metaphysics, which Mormonism must and does, any failure of the Mormon theologians to find meaning in the issue of universals is simply their failure to think profoundly on the most crucial and inescapable problem in metaphysics. Present-day Mormon theologians should not be circumscribed by the failures of their predecessors. I hope Professor Anderson will reconsider this matter. (He mentions that Truman Madsen and I argued over this issue of Mormon doctrine and universals some time ago in the *Brigham Young University Studies*. I have the impression that neither Madsen nor Anderson realizes that I won the argument.)

Professor Anderson seems to hold that evil is simply a product of the environment, while man is innately good. This may be the case, but it certainly is not the accepted Mormon position. The emphasis on the freedom of man in Mormonism is clearly intended to mean that he may be either good or evil in his choices — not that goodness comes from within and evil from without. I think Professor Anderson misuses the books of Mosiah and Moses at this point, though in the next paragraph he seems to see the matter clearly. The Mormon scriptures treat the fact of evil on a more basic level than he credits them. It is interesting to me that while Brigham Young didn't hesitate to take issue with the apostle Paul on the matter of man's nature, Professor Anderson seems determined to demonstrate that there is no issue between them. Some of the creators of Mormonism were willing to take on all comers — even when they came out of the Bible. But, sad to say, that kind of magnificent independence is gone. Now it's agreement and harmony at any cost: Brigham Young, who thought he was disagreeing with Paul, is seen as simply rounding out the picture.

I can see only confusion for Mormon theology if it follows Professor Anderson's technique for treating such issues as the divine omnipotence and omniscience. The typical Mormon discussion of God as evolving or progressing is a superficial attempt to get at an idea that could be given a profound formulation. To talk about God as one might discuss the education

of a human being, as some Mormons often do, is to reveal the utter naivete that all too often characterizes Mormon thought.

I have trouble also with Professor Anderson's treatment of the Mormon doctrine of salvation, where I think he is in some difficulty. But basically the fault is not his. It seems to me that he is trying to make a confused idea appear to be simple and reasonable rather than admit that at this point typical Mormon doctrine is in serious difficulties. I hope that Mormon theology is able to offer a doctrine of salvation that is more than, to quote Professor Anderson, "the cumulative achievement of building a sin-free character." I agree with Anderson that Mormon theology, which is intensely moralistic, inclines strongly in this direction. But surely the Christian doctrine of Christ means more to the Mormons than this. Is the Church not more than a glorified ethical society? Has the Mormon theologian abandoned all sense of the tragedy of existence and the meaning of redemption?

Professor Anderson wants me to justify my references to Mormon theology as Pelagian. On page fifty-eight I reproduced the most important extant description of Pelagianism and I'm sure the basic similarities to Mormonism are entirely evident. The differences are equally obvious, but I take them for granted. I do not mean that Mormonism and Pelagianism are identical, but that it is especially the Pelagian qualities of Mormonism which distinguish it from the classical forms of Christian orthodoxy.

Finally, Professor Anderson chides me for not getting at Mormon theology through the scriptures. I appreciate the force of his argument. But to describe the scriptural grounds of the theology was not the purpose of my essays. Moreover, the Mormon theology is not as thoroughly grounded in scripture as its surface appearance indicates and as Anderson seems to suggest. For one thing, the Mormons generally have not been reliable readers of scripture. They have been users of it, and often their uses have been abuses and should best be forgotten.

The worst thing that could happen to any theology is now happening to the theology of the Mormons — by the default of the prophets it has been appropriated by the academics. The chief theological atrocities are currently committed at the Brigham Young University, where there is a studied irrationalism and a sophisticated effort to square the doctrines with ancient and esoteric lore, scriptural and non-scriptural, rather than with the facts of life. This is the strangest aberration that has yet appeared in the implausible history of Mormonism, a kind of philologizing of religion. The real strength of Mormon theology has not been in its scriptural foundations any more than in its logical or metaphysical discriminations. Its strength has been in its concreteness, its sincerity, its humane integrity, its genuine relevance to the life of the Mormon people, a people who were once powerfully moved by it but for whom it has now become too often an instrument for rationalization and an object of petty dispute.

The following anecdote is taken from a letter written by Juanita Brooks, distinguished Mormon historian and editor, who is presently working on a history of the Jews in Utah. Next there is note on play production at Brigham Young University by Harold I. Hansen, Chairman of the Dramatic Arts Department, and finally two notes by Stanford medicine men, J. Robert Griffin, M.D., who just began his internship, and Hal Cole, a senior medical student who has recently been serving on the hospital ship Hope in Nicaragua.

RIDING HERD (Excerpt from a Letter)

Juanita Brooks

My statement regarding my father's idea of "riding herd" is, like most analogies, subject to question because any analogy is bound to be faulty in some respects. But for whatever it is worth, here it is:

My father early recognized my tendency to question, to disagree, to refuse to take many of the Old Testament stories at face value. I could not admire Jacob's ethics in stealing his brother's birthright; I did not believe that the wind from tin horns would blow down the walls of Jericho, but insisted that they "fell" figuratively when the guards panicked and ran; if bears came out and devoured the children who called Elijah "old bald-pate," I didn't think God sent them, etc., etc.

One day Dad said to me, "My girl, if you follow this tendency to criticize, I'm afraid you will talk yourself out of the Church. I'd hate to see you do that. I'm a cowboy, and I've learned that if I ride *in* the herd, I am lost — totally helpless. One who rides counter to it is trampled and killed. One who only trails behind means little, because he leaves all responsibility to others. It is the cowboy who rides the edge of the herd, who sings and calls and makes himself heard who helps direct the course. Happy sounds are generally better than cursing, but there are times when he must maybe swear a little and swing a whip or lariat to round in a stray or turn the leaders. So don't lose yourself, and don't ride away and desert the outfit. Ride the edge of the herd and be alert, but know your directions, and call out loud and clear. Chances are, you won't make any difference, but on the other hand, you just might."

PRODUCTION OF PLAYS WITH MORMON THEMES

Harold Hansen

The Dramatic Arts Department recently initiated a new program to encourage Mormon playwrights to write on Mormon themes for production at Brigham Young University. During the 1965-66 theatre season an "arena series" was held featuring such original Mormon dramas. The first production was a story of pioneer life; the second, a drama of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith; and the third, a musical play dealing with the theme of polygamy.

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Stark family, who, with other pioneers, were sent by Brigham Young to settle in the Nevada wasteland. Stark believes that in Nevada he has found the "significant thread" of his life. But the majority of the settlers decide to return to Utah. Even Stark's own family find numerous reasons for leaving Nevada. Finally, President Brigham Young sends word that the Saints are released from their "call" to the settlement. The climax occurs when Esther, Stark's wife, makes her decision to return to Utah with the rest of the Saints, and in so doing, she attacks the reasons behind Stark's resolute stand to remain in Nevada. Dr. Clinton Larson's review of the play states:

Through [the play] the audience comes to believe the thesis of of Mormon stoicism: a spirituality so disciplined that it seeks the crucible in which it may be fairly tested, exhibiting an independence irrespective, even, of Church authority, like a personal witness of the divinity of Christ.

The second play, *No Greater Crown*, was written by Dr. Martin C. Nalder, a practicing psychiatrist of Los Angeles, California. Directed by Professor Charles W. Whitman, this drama played for two and one-half weeks to a full house. The play covers the last six months of the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the action taking place in and near Nauvoo, Illinois. The story concerns the apostasy of William Law, second counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency, and his conspiracy with Robert Foster and Joseph Jackson to take the life of the Prophet. A secondary theme treats a conflict between Joseph Smith and his wife, Emma, who maintains that she is too tired to pack up and run again. The audience is made to see a more sympathetic Emma who, perhaps, has valid reasons for the stand she takes, although her disaffection from the Church is not justified in the play.

The Red Plush Parlor, a three-act musical play, book and lyrics by Christie Lund Coles, music by Larry Bastian, has been adapted and directed by Dr. Lael J. Woodbury. It is a light and lively play set in the late 1800's in a small Utah town and concerns the polygamous home of one Lars Knudsen. The action of the play takes place in a red plush parlor, reserved for state occasions, which is being made ready for the arrival of Sister Shaw, a recent French convert, who, Lars and his six wives believe, will be his seventh wife. The lilting quality of Mrs. Cole's lyrics is a delightful addition to an already charming story.

Scripts for the coming seasons are now welcomed by the Dramatic Arts faculty of Brigham Young University. Serious or humorous dramas on Mormon themes, either historical or modern, will be accepted. The scripts should not portray drinking or smoking and the language and action should at all times be in harmony with the highest standards of the Church. We hope that an original series can be presented each year, and therefore there is no specific deadline for completed manuscripts.

IMPROVING THE GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

J. Robert Griffin

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who often make little advance preparation beyond peremptory perusal of the lesson manual. In an attempt to determine common attitudes towards this traditional method of instruction, a poll of gospel doctrine class members was undertaken several years ago by Lonnie Heaton Nave, then gospel doctrine class advisor on the East Mill Creek Sunday School Stake Board, Salt Lake City, with assistance from Calvin Taylor of the Department of Psychology, University of Utah. A sixteen-item questionnaire was prepared and uniformly administered to the various gospel doctrine classes throughout the stake.

Three hundred and thirty-one persons answered the questionnaire. Two hundred and seventy-six had been or currently were teachers in various auxiliary organizations; of these ninety-four per cent believed that the teacher learned more than the class members. Among the 331 respondents, eleven per cent considered their role in the gospel doctrine class fulfilled by being "consistent in attending my meetings and being found in my place" and twenty-nine per cent stated that they were "content to listen and enjoy the discussion"; thus, a total of forty per cent of the class members, including many experienced church teachers, expected to fulfill only a passive role in Sunday School classes. Nineteen per cent anticipated "a stimulating lesson." Thirty-eight per cent indicated a desire to be "actively engaged in an effort to make the subject matter my own knowledge," and suggested that they wished to be more active in the class than is commonly the case.

Although some ninety-eight per cent of the respondents felt that "a greater amount of the learning activity could be shared by class members," seventy-four per cent preferred the traditional approach of lessons from the manual plus varying degrees of teacher enrichment, and eighty per cent desired the customary lecture-discussion method of teaching. Only twenty-three per cent stated that they would like "outlines, references, and a bibliography to supplement the manual"; of these, only thirty-five per cent said that they would "make use of the further helps or share in providing them." When asked if the subject matter should be taught in a way to facilitate note-taking, "with a view to compiling a file of your own," sixty-three per cent answered "No." As to whether testing should be employed in Sunday School, only thirty-seven per cent felt that "such testing would be of value to me in learning the subject" and thirty-one per cent said that they "would resent this classroom activity."

Clearly, this study indicates that most class members preferred their customary passive roles even though a majority had at one time served as teachers and although fully one-third were then teaching in a church organization. In view of these results the question arises as to how well the Sunday School classes are fulfilling their purpose of teaching the gospel to adult members of the Church. Evidently many "active" members of the Church do not consider that Sunday School is the place to find stimulation and direction for personal study of the gospel. Perhaps other stakes could benefit from the example of the East Mill Creek Sunday School Stake Board in examining what attitudes prevail generally in their classes as a prelude to determining what can be done to promote greater learning in gospel doctrine classes.

AND WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SCRIPTURE?

Hal Cole

We are involved in a sub-culture fascinated by words. And rightly so, for do we not as a church claim to have the modern words of the Lord to His people? Is there not a prophet of the Lord who this day stands as His spokesman? We have come to deeply revere His words as recorded in our scriptures and as we receive them today.

But I note in university ward meetings and classes a tendency to quote the writings of wise men, especially those concerned with interpersonal relationships. In their emphasis on the beauty of contact between man and man they often confuse the first and great commandment with that which is like unto it. The conscious realization that through our relationship with the Lord we learn the basis of love for our literal spiritual brothers is essential to our identity as Christians.

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. . . . We love Him, because He first loved us . . . and this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God loveth his brother also.”

I John 4:7, 19, 21

Thus we can love another because He first loved us, giving us the example of His son’s life and sacrifice.

Each of us is alternately troubled and amused by his relationships with others, but from what sources are we to gain the greatest understanding? Might we not most benefit by reading of relationships made beautiful by the Lord’s presence in them — of David and Jonathan, Boaz and Ruth, Alma and the four sons of Mosiah, the man and woman in the Song of Songs? When Jonathan parts from David with the words, “Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever . . . ,’” this is the tender promise of a man who knows the Lord’s place in his love for David, who knows the meaning of solemn and eternal covenants kept before the Lord. Certainly the excitement of facing the Lord together in the mutual humility of prayer or covenant is neither old-fashioned nor saccharine, but an adventure requiring genuine oneness and a single hand reaching for the Lord.

It seems the four standard works of the university wards are becoming *I and Thou*, *The Prophet*, *The Art of Loving*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*. When did we last in church hear words from Titus, Second Peter, First Thessalonians, Nahum, Zechariah, Omni, or Jerom? Note the doctrinal and literary importance of these words of the Lord to His prophet Zechariah:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass . . . and He shall speak peace unto the heathen; and His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. As for thee also, by the blood of thy covenant I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water.” Zech. 9:9-11

Tillich and Kierkegaard were good and humble men, but they based their beliefs and writings on assumptions which are very different from our own. They would have smiled at the idea of a God with a physical body like ours who endured a life like ours toward His exaltation. Neither of these men claimed to have increased his height a cubit by taking thought. Each wrote many perceptive things, carefully watching the syntax and logic or illogic, depending on his mood. But never did they write, "Thus saith the Lord God unto His people."

The same of course is true for the writings of men of station in the Church, which are too often quoted as quasi-scriptures, and for the books of sermons and the *Golden Nuggets of Thought* variety of popular guides.

I cannot stand apart from my own observations. I have certainly been known to teach classes which were a homogenate of Dostoevsky, T. S. Eliot, and Thomas a Kempis. Much of what I have enjoyed in the writings of these men is their striking personification of basic Christian truths and their vivid portrayal of struggle, which I hadn't the energy to appreciate in their simpler, scriptural form.

There are differences between the writings of men through whom the word of the Lord comes and those of others. It seems that if one is in the midst of scaling a cliff face with shabby equipment which threatens to plunge him into the dark abyss below, one's thoughts tend to focus on the cliff, the struggle, the uncertainty of success, and the everpresent alternative of the abyss. But if one has finally pleaded for help, relinquished his equipment, and sought an outstretched hand which helps pull him over the top, his thoughts are quite different. He praises the view and the helper, proclaims the reality and deliciousness of success, and encourages others to follow. Only at that point is he in a position of sufficient confidence to be able to hear whatever words might be spoken to him. Almost all of us remain on the cliff face, perhaps discussing how thrilling it is to let go of our handhold for a few seconds, but not seriously seeking or wanting the responsibility of grasping the helper's hand or reaching the top.

Dialogue seems to be an attempt to describe in words the dynamics of the cliff-dweller's existence and the effects on our actions and thinking of our intermittent relationship with the Lord. Being written almost entirely by men on the cliff, much consideration of abyss and conflict is to be expected. I believe *Dialogue* will be of great use to its audience and will convey wisdom and understanding. But it will contain no new doctrine — a more vivid portrayal of struggle, perhaps — but no new truths. It has missionary potential among the intellectually oriented, it is worthy of support, but it will never declare, "Thus saith the Lord God unto His people. . . ."

The words of the Lord are sacred to us; let us explore them and use them in reverence and order. Let us not confuse them with the words of men or dissect them for sport or pride. May we remember that they have brought us out of darkness.