

LETTERS

Avoiding the Trap

Donlu D. Thayer's article in the Fall 1989 *Dialogue*, "Top Kingdom: The Mormon Race for the Celestial Gates," was both interesting and thought-provoking. As a mother, I, too, have considered the wisdom of competition, particularly when a child of mine has been the "loser," inconsolable over a seemingly trivial contest.

In light of the article's excellence, I was very surprised to note Thayer promoting the very competition she was decrying. Near the end of the article she described a "masculine worldview" and a "feminine worldview" and left little doubt that she considered the feminine far superior to the masculine. In so labeling these respective views, she brought to mind the continual, yet undesirable, competition between men and women. How much more effective the article against competitiveness could have been had that labeling been different! Nongender, noncompetitive labels such as self-seeking (instead of "masculine") and group-seeking (instead of "feminine") would have been equally descriptive while avoiding the competition trap.

Paula Larsen
Delta, Utah

Compromising Competition

It was most fitting that my copy of *Dialogue* arrived the day before I left on a long, boring flight to Frankfurt, Germany,

where my son David had completed a mission for our church. David and *Dialogue* were conceived at about the same time. I remember attending a student ward at the University of Utah in the late sixties, and a frequent topic at firesides was "*Dialogue*, to be or not to be?" My bookshelves now hold every issue since the first with only a few missing that were loaned out and never returned. When David was in high school, I pulled from the shelves the volumes containing my favorite articles and essays for him to read.

At times during the last twenty-two years I have been lonely. The joy I experienced discussing in student wards was dampened when my husband and I returned to the "real" world of resident wards. Suddenly "blind obedience" seemed to be a much admired trait. Our stake president was much enamored with numbers and percentages. Sacrament meeting attendance was prominently displayed from the stand along with the page numbers for hymns.

In the past I have been outspoken, but now when sitting in a class at church I usually keep my ideas to myself. I have learned not to upset people. My ideas have never changed anyone and have only made most of my fellow ward members mistrustful of me, thereby increasing my loneliness. *Dialogue* helps alleviate that feeling of isolation. I smiled and underlined repeatedly as I read Donlu Thayer's "Top Kingdom" (Fall 1989), even adding stars and exclamation points. (I do not consider a book or article worthy of reading unless I have an overwhelming urge to *underline*.) In her essay, I found

ideas (so eloquently expressed) that I have been thinking and saying for years! I, too, have been sickened by the destructive competition of sports. Instead I have urged my children on in academic competition, thinking it to be more benign, if not very beneficial.

My son David's two years in Germany were difficult. His ideas about being a missionary often conflicted with the expectations of his mission president, who expressed goals in terms of numbers of baptisms, numbers of Books of Mormon given out, and numbers of hours worked. I just wanted David to go to Germany and love and teach the people. David wanted to teach with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately that is what he did, but not without a lot of rebuking by his district leaders.

"Success" for missionaries—or for anyone with a Church calling—seems to be a paradox. Striving for success means being concerned with self, but the gospel of Christ means concern for others. In a little motherly advice I sent my son, I urged him to love the people, follow Christ's teachings, and success would come. And it did. Not the success measured in numbers, but a whole new dimension to his life. I saw a person who had been successful academically learn to value and care for people.

Perhaps Donlu Thayer would be interested in an experience I have had with competition. Almost ten years ago, realizing middle age was fast approaching, I—a klutz whose only C in high school was in gym—took up running. (Actually at my speed, slow jogging is probably a better description.) I remember the sweat and ecstasy the first time I ran *five* miles. Since I had little hope of getting much faster, my goal became to go farther. I began entering races; and because of sparse competition in my age group, I even won a couple of ribbons.

Eventually I decided to try a marathon. I'm sure among the front runners in a marathon the competition can

be intense. But in the back of the pack, feelings are different. Friends are made. The strong help the weak. My future daughter-in-law and I ran the St. George marathon in 1987. Janet was running out of steam (far ahead of me), but another woman who could have run ahead, stuck with her, offering emotional support to help her reach the finish, a beautiful example of love, not competition. I have read of people running a race together and crossing the finish line holding hands. To me, that is an example of the gospel of Christ.

Thanks, *Dialogue*, for being a friend. I promise I'll have Lisa, my seventeen-year-old daughter, read the "Top Kingdom" essay I enjoyed so much . . . after she competes as a Sterling Scholar in April.

Maude Norman
Bountiful, Utah

A Hug at the Finish

Donlu Thayer's "Top Kingdom: The Mormon Race for the Celestial Gates" (Fall 1989) provided some real food for thought. I've often thought that the Special Olympics has the right idea about rewards at the end of the race. No matter what the athlete's "handicap"—or in what order they arrive—*everyone* is met at the finish line with a hug and a ribbon. What a wonderful way to compete!

Shelley Smith Garay
Cali, Colombia
South America

More Science/Religion Controversy

If any one thing is clear from LDS writings on science and religion, it is the belief that science and religion will be unified by ultimate truth. Most often writers take a generally accepted scientific premise or theory and compare it with an

LDS teaching. If there is an apparent conflict, then either the scientific premise is suspect or the LDS teaching is found to be "unofficial"; in either case, unity is preserved. The choice of whether to reject the scientific or the religious premise to preserve unity is sometimes more a function of the perspective of the author than of any recognized ultimate truth.

Dialogue authors of scientific persuasion have in the past argued that creationist stories firmly entrenched in Church teachings and vigorously defended in LDS congregations are not religious truths because they are not found in an official declaration of the First Presidency. In the extreme, this approach leads to acceptance of prophetic infallibility in the Church, a position uniformly denied but perhaps closer to actuality than we care to admit. Most of what is accepted in the Church as gospel truth is not found in any official declaration of the First Presidency, and history has shown these declarations need not be regarded as the final truth on a matter.

Comparing scientific and religious truths is difficult; different methods are used to arrive at truth in the two areas. Charles Boyd (*Dialogue*, Winter 1989) rejects much of science as "forever tentative," citing seemingly conflicting interpretations, extensions, or revisions of modern scientific theories as evidence that science does not offer "ultimate truth." In his reply in the same issue, David Bailey essentially agrees and points to a few examples of LDS teachings and doctrines as also "forever tentative."

Boyd seems to set very high standards for scientific truth. If I interpret his ideas correctly, principles of ultimate truth, at least in science, should be completely supported by all direct or peripheral experimental evidence, should have no substantial published criticism, and should remain essentially unchanged since first formulated. These are tough standards; and although I believe we can arrive at truth using less restrictive criteria, many scien-

tific principles meet and exceed Boyd's standards. The second law of thermodynamics stands essentially as it was formulated by Carnot and Clausius over one hundred years ago; concisely stated, "The entropy or disorder of the universe strives toward a maximum." This simple scientific declaration is supported by all relevant experimental data and has not been successfully criticized or challenged, yet it stands in direct conflict with the concept of a god who intends to maintain order in all things through eternity but is constrained by physical laws.

Some resolve these types of difficulties by employing standards for truth even more restrictive than Boyd's and relegate troublesome scientific theories to mere human supposition. What happens when we apply Boyd's standards to LDS doctrine? The task is difficult because the essence of a Church based on continuous revelation is truth accompanied by continual change. Because all fundamental LDS doctrine and beliefs have undergone revision at one time or another, not a single one can stand up to Boyd's standards for ultimate truth.

Henry Eyring's admonition to find the truth in the Church and follow it is easier for some than others. Some accept the pronouncements of the General Authorities as the basis of religious truth, but this invokes a new, much lower set of standards for discerning truth than Boyd espouses. If we apply consistent standards to both science and religion, identification of any ultimate truth in religion requires standards loose enough to also accept as ultimate truth the scientific theories supported by leaders in the field of science, including the theories to which Boyd objected.

When standards defining truth in science and in religion differ, the science/religion controversy continues, but it is not waged on equitable grounds. Extending the rigorous standards for truth expected in science to religion essentially eliminates the controversy. Religious

truths do not survive the test. The science/religion issue will not be resolved, not because science is forever tentative, but rather because religious truths are too illusive.

Norman L. Eatough
San Luis Obispo, California

Thoughts on Bailey and Boyd

I would like to make a few random observations on the Bailey-Boyd exchange (Winter 1989) concerning David Bailey's, "Scientific Foundations of Mormon Theology" (Summer 1988).

First, Charles Boyd objects to Bailey's use of the word "theology" in a Mormon context. I remind him of Widsöe's *A Rational Theology*, Roberts's *Seventy's Course in Theology*, and Pratt's *Key to the Science of Theology*. Beyond precedent, however, why concern ourselves with mere terminology? Need we all gooseteap together parroting the same words?

Second, why should anyone be "saddened" (Boyd, p. 143) by an article that merely proposes an open discussion of the way science may impact theology? Although I personally see no need to revise doctrine or issue new pronouncements as a result of current scientific knowledge, I found Bailey's article informative and stimulating.

Third, Bailey claims that quantum theory limits the extent of God's foreknowledge. Does not the special theory of relativity, which, as I understand it, renders the matter of sequence of events relative to various time frames, suggest the possibility of deity knowing things before they appear to us to have happened? (I hasten to add that I am not a scientist, and I offer the idea out of mere curiosity.)

Fourth, Boyd finds it regrettable that some General Authorities have from time to time become embroiled in scientific debates but holds that they have been much less "anti-scientific" (p. 149) than

some critics have suggested. Although I greatly admire and sustain the General Authorities, some have indeed played hob with science, pooh-poohing, for example, the great weight of evidence pointing to a very old earth as well as life and death for millions of years before the "adamic dispensation." Those usually charged with an anti-science attitude have all also produced sermons and writings I greatly value. However, when (or if) they discourse on such subjects as science or the stock market, I prefer the views of men like Henry Eyring or Charles Boyd respectively.

Regarding the age of life on earth, I am in awe of the alacrity and derring-do with which our "fundamentalist" friends assume the sisyphian toil of rolling tyrannosaurus rex into the post-Garden world—truly a textbook case of the Emperor's Clothes.

Thomas J. Quinlan
Salt Lake City

The Philosophy of Heaven

Many years ago I came to recognize that the basic materialism of existential philosophy and its determination to accept the cosmos as is, without idealistic prettification, presented many parallels with Mormonism. To be sure, Mormonism accepts the existence of God, while the best known variants of existentialism don't. But the Mormon concept of deity is so radically different from conventional religion—being really an extension of human existence—that I had come to think of Mormonism as "deistic existentialism."

Indeed, for the past couple of years I have been building up courage and awaiting the muse to undertake writing a paper setting forth this view for *Dialogue* readers. Imagine my delight in receiving your most recent issue (Winter 1989) to read a presentation by Michelle Stott

which, with all pride of conception, I must concede is probably better than I would have written myself. Again, *Dialogue* has accomplished its stated purpose of publishing thought-provoking treatment and commentary on Latter-day Saint doctrine and history, bringing thoughtful Mormons into intellectual contact with the broad world philosophy, religion, and letters.

As has been said by any number of past General Authorities, Mormonism is the "philosophy of heaven," and one's testimony can only be strengthened by delving into the best of the world's philosophies and thoughtfully comparing them to the religion revealed and restored by latter-day prophets. Descartes, Pascal, Hume, Kant, Whitehead, Sartre, or Heidegger provide us with many provocative and useful insights, but in my estimation not a single important new truth not contained in revealed religion. One would hope that some contemporary Church leaders had as much faith in the intellectual supremacy of the gospel (and the ability of Latter-day Saints to compare and choose) as did the Prophet Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, David O. McKay, or Spencer W. Kimball.

David Timmins
Washington, D. C.

One for All

In my essay "Beached on the Wasatch Front: Probing the Us and Them Paradigm," published in the Summer 1989 issue of *Dialogue*, I asserted that black South African Church members are required to use a separate entrance to the temple. I was, however, mistaken. I have since learned that my source was misinformed, and further checking (with Stanley G. Smith, who oversaw construction of the temple) has confirmed that all members of the Church in South Africa use the same temple entrance. I apologize for any

confusion my inaccuracy may have caused.

Karen M. Moloney
Westwood, California

The Road to Zion

Though Jeffrey Jacob has done a fine job of introducing the concept of a Mormon utopian ideal (Summer 1989), his article falls short of giving direction. He lists five characteristics of a Mormon utopia—equality, cooperation, community self-reliance, voluntary simplicity, and ecological integrity—then drops the idea like a hot potato.

The Latter-day Saints failed to realize a utopia during both Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's lifetimes. Since that time, the Church has been on an "alternative" route. The Welfare Program has been hailed as a move towards the law of consecration and utopia, albeit a small one. Unfortunately it hasn't worked. We are as far today from a utopia as at any time in the history of the Church. Jacob's article represents the prime reason we are not even contemplating the utopian question—worldly concerns. Unfortunately, the world is not the least interested in Jacob's five characteristics of a Mormon utopia. In fact, the world views these qualities with contempt unless they are profitable. And therein lies the rub. The "well-to-do" middle class does not find any answers in a utopia and does not believe it can work. These attitudes prevent any practical advance towards creating a utopia.

There are those, however, who have been willing and able to hold such attitudes despite all worldly concerns. The Anabaptists (Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites), the Hutterian Brotherhood, and the Israeli *kibbutzim* have all reached a plateau of success. We can learn from these people. We need not approach them in guilt from our past failures, but in brotherhood. A Mormon utopia is a prophetic

destiny of the Church. Why not now? Why not us?

It seems that most of us are more concerned about progress reports, financial statements, profit curves, sales projections, the GNP, DOW averages, political office, and money in the bank than we are with being pure in heart, following God's commandments, having no poor among us, and being equal in all things. We have two choices: Zion or Mammon.

Are we justified in gathering the wealth until we can live the law of consecration? There is no better road than the one to Zion. Jacob's status as an upper-middle-class gatekeeper gives him the opportunity to pass some utopians on into society. I wonder if he is taking advantage of that opportunity.

Robert Hubble
Red Wing, Minnesota

