

LETTERS

A Gift of Empowerment

I have only recently finished a cover-to-cover reading of the Fall 1990 Women's Issue, and I must send my thanks and sense of awe-struck appreciation for an issue of such power and magnitude. I have pondered for some weeks now just what I can possibly say to express my sense of indebtedness to each and every contributor, and unfortunately I have come up empty-handed. Still, I must somehow try. I would like to slowly enunciate each contributor's name like a magical incantation, as if by doing so I could call their presence to me and embrace them quietly in gratitude. I would like to grasp the arms of strangers passing me by in blissful oblivion on the street and with "too-bright eyes" thrust the book upon them, a gift of mysterious empowerment and awareness. With a clap of my hands, I would bring you all into my presence for an evening of shared experience. It will have to be enough, I guess, to simply say that individually and collectively you have worked a change in me that may help me change my life. Great potential, always hovering nearby, seems irresistibly summoned closer—the potential to see myself, my life, my choices, my loved ones, and the world beyond with greater clarity and vision—and with a reborn sense of commitment and ability to follow through on the vision that comes.

I have been an avid reader of *DIALOGUE* for many long years now—practically a charter member, although I was myself only thirteen when *DIALOGUE* was born and made its sure way into the book rack in my parental home—and I am often renewed, educated, strengthened, incensed, and moved by its pages. I am even now discussing with my husband cer-

tain of the articles in the Winter 1990 issue with fervor, concern, and pleasure. And yet, my experience with the Fall 1990 issue was of such a transcendental nature that it somehow went beyond all of my previous experiences. Is it, I am moved to wonder, because of the sense of shared sisterhood that accompanied me on my journey through its pages? A sense of shared truth, grief, knowledge, power, and commitment? Whatever the reality of my experience may be, each moment of oneness with the worlds therein spoke to me with a directness and raw urgency that was at once sweet and almost too inexpressibly painful to bear. Thank you.

Kimberlee Staking
Bourron-Marlotte, France

Copying

In a letter to the editor (Spring 1991), Frederick Buchanan refers to some information he "picked up some years ago" (p. 9) regarding the Ephrata Cloister community and vicarious baptism. It was Fawn Brodie who first insinuated, so far as I can learn, that Joseph Smith got the idea for vicarious ordinance work from "at least one German sect" in Pennsylvania (*No Man Knows My History*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1946, p. 282). In the interim, I reported in detail the history of that community and its doctrine and practices ("Mysteries of the Kingdom: More or Less," *BYU Studies*, 5 [Spring-Summer 1964]: 3-4).

The nexus suggested by Brodie seemed plausible, for one of the first of that community was an Alexander Mack and might have been part of the family of Joseph's in-laws. Reciprocal baptisms by immersion had been performed in Schwarzenau, Germany, as early as 1708. Upon emigration to Penn's colony, mem-

bers of the group performed triune immersions 15 December 1723, followed later in the day (after everyone had a chance to thaw out) by a full love feast eaten in silence and the washing of the feet of the inducted by the newly chosen presiding officers. The group adopted an ascetic and celibate monastic life. Before they died out, they began publishing their own literature, utilizing the services of one B. Franklin of Philadelphia while awaiting the arrival of their own press and type from Germany.

To use up the energy left over by their celibate, monastic lifestyle, they built towers and took turns standing watch, four hours at a time, every night to welcome the Grand Judge. They adopted rites which they claimed came from the Egyptian Cult of Mystic Free-masonry and a shaven tonsure, which naturally aroused curiosity and enmity from their Scotch-Irish neighbors. But members of the group cared solicitously for wounded Revolutionary War soldiers and got typhus for their troubles, greatly hastening the end of the community.

Before the group's demise, vicarious baptisms by Emanuel Eckerling, Mack, and others were performed in 1738 for their deceased but improperly baptized ancestors back in Germany. Unfortunately for Brodie's premise, Lucy Mack's people were Scotch, not German. Apart from Brodie's gratuitous assumption that Joseph Smith copied everything he taught (except *apothecosis*, which Brodie was wrongly willing to let him dream up on his own) there is not the slightest reason to believe that Smith knew anything of the mystics at Hock-Halekung or of their theology of baptism.

William L. Knecht
Moraga, California

Spiritual Food

As a new reader of DIALOGUE, I would like to thank you for the wonderful articles, poems, and art you publish. I have recently been reactivated into the Church,

and I struggled with giving up my intellectual endeavors (however young they may be) in my new life. DIALOGUE helped me reconcile this, and my life is more full.

Now serving a mission for the Church, I always look forward to each issue as an alternative source of refreshment and relaxation. Some articles have helped me in preparing talks for district and zone meetings. My mission president has even borrowed a couple issues for his own personal study. My knowledge has been deepened and my spirit fed. Thank you.

Dallas B. Robbins
Indiana Indianapolis Mission

Those Offending Covers

Although I once ran an art center, I am, probably, a Philistine, or certainly would be branded one if I told you what I really think about your selection of the subject matter for the front and back covers of the Spring 1991 issue.

Randall Lake is undoubtedly a skilled artist. He actually pays attention to the old verities of line, form, mass, color, even anatomy—things too many contemporary artists ignore in the as yet unnamed, experimental phase of what passes for art today.

But blatantly featuring "Rococo Punk" and "Sixteen" in a "Journal of Mormon Thought"? Is DIALOGUE now currying the MTV crowd? This subscriber certainly hopes not.

I keep this issue upright on a shelf so the offending covers do not remind me of those in our society who have nothing to say and a thousand ways of saying it, of those who may not always remain young, but can be immature forever.

Stanley B. Kimball
Edwardsville, Illinois

A Fundamental Difference

When I first subscribed to DIALOGUE nearly a year ago, I was enthralled by the content and the attitude; I eagerly ordered all the cut-rate back issues avail-

able and read them over the next several months. My enthusiasm has been dampened, however, by a gradual realization: the dichotomy between “iron rods” and “liahonas” is not simply a difference of style, but a fundamental difference in substance—whom we rely on to discern truth.

A dialogue-oriented person believes that the purest source of truth is the Holy Spirit speaking peace and logic to the soul. Such individuals therefore give the highest credibility to those truths personally known through testimony; all else has yet to be proved and is fair game for inquiry.

Latter-day Saint doctrine, however, ultimately requires a belief that the highest source of truth is those in authority.

The only proper objects of inquiry, then, are things produced outside their purview. From this perspective, all of our dialogue, unfortunately, is perceived as “counseling the Brethren” or “steading the ark.”

Of course, most of us believe this dichotomy is not fundamental, merely stylistic, and that in time we will all grow toward a unity of the faith. Our hope springs (nearly) eternal on that point, in fact. Of late, however, I have begun to fear that the difference will not be reconciled, only minimized. I may never feel true unity with the body of the Saints.

Craig B. Wilson
Coalinga, California

