

*Whole, Unhomogenized Religion.*

I was drowning in a sea of religious mediocrity when the first issues of *Dialogue* rescued me and renewed my faith in my beloved religion, with its stimulating and challenging, deep, intellectual concepts undergirding a sustaining, productive, and thoroughly practical faith. The Lord had given us good minds and had explicitly instructed us to use them—to plow more than two inches deep and not just swallow what was preached from the pulpit by well meaning laity or by church “scriptorians.”

When *Dialogue* became “elitist”—the province of the professional scholars in the church—I shifted my allegiance to *Sunstone* where, though also loaded with authors bearing M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, there was room for amateurs like myself. It has been my privilege to present half a dozen papers at the symposiums—three of which have dealt with the Pentateuch, the scriptural “heart” of the Old Testament, which has intrigued me since my course from Dr. Heber C. Snell at the Pocatello Institute in 1938.

I have tried hard to uncover what the various accounts actually said, stripping off the two millennia of exegesis that we have inherited from our Protestant converts and probing the implications which often modified, undermined, or even contradicted commonly accepted religious concepts. I find it a little strange that of the hundred or so papers on a Sympo-

sium program, mine were often the only ones dealing with the “holy” Bible, the first of our “four standard works.”

I am having a rough time in my present Gospel Doctrine class, which seems to be neither a “school” nor a “study,” nor even to deal accurately with the “Old Testament.” My tolerant, well-educated teacher is doing his best, however, to blend my data in with the recycled religious catechism of the lesson. In my opinion, our lack of genuine Bible scholars is a serious defect in the church today. Religion teachers in our church universities are hopelessly deformed by the intellectual incest there and seem to have little actual scholarship to offer.

We need both *Dialogue* and *Sunstone*, along with the (copy-cat) *Religious Studies* and *Know Your Religion* indoctrination seminars. Homogenized Mormonism is my idea of Hell.

Lew W. Wallace, M.D.  
San Gabriel, California

*Surprised and Reassured*

I am grateful to renew my subscription to *Dialogue*, to read the honest observations of so very many minds. I was totally shocked with the news of how blacks were treated by Mormon presidents in Salt Lake City. Before reading Michael Quinn’s article (Vol. 33, No. 3) I had not known that Brigham Young directly contradicted Joseph

Smith's proposal in 1844 "to abolish slavery by the year 1850." Nor did I realize that Utah Mormonism's reversal of Joseph Smith's social policy toward Negroes was mirrored by the refusal of LDS presidents to follow the founding prophet's example of giving the priesthood to blacks who were not slaves.

In Greg Prince's essay, "David O. McKay and the 'Twin Sisters' Free Agency and Tolerance," (Vol. 33, No.4) we are introduced to the principles and also the need for members to adapt to the miscellaneous mistakes made in the church, "even by leaders."

In the same issue's "Letters to the Editor," I found Gerry L. Ensley's enthusiasm for Hugh Nibley's discovery of "Jesus Logia," and his parallelomania and his "conclusive" evidence in favor of Smith to be very informative. I agree that Nibley should be ranked "as the greatest Defender of Mormon Christianity in the 21st Century." I especially like this quote included in the letter: Jesus said, "If you could see your real image, which came into being before you, then you would be willing to endure anything." Thank you so very much!

Rhoda Thurtson  
Hatch, New Mexico

### *Unfair and Misleading*

Michael Quinn's "Prelude to the National Defense of Marriage Campaign: Civil Discrimination Against Feared or Despised Minori-

ties," (Vol.33, No.3) is a misleading article that unfairly attacks the LDS church for its defense of traditional marriage. Quinn claims that the church is violating individual "civil rights" by opposing same-sex marriage and advocates a change in church policy. He seeks to show by his exhaustive study that the church's position regarding same-sex marriage is irrational and without historical justification. I suggest that Quinn broaden his essay to include an examination of the most important historical documents, the scriptures.

The opening pages of Genesis record the union of Adam and Eve and specifically endorse marriage between a man and a woman: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh." (Genesis 2:24) This definition of marriage is also found in the *Doctrine and Covenants* 42:22, ("Thou shalt love thy wife with all thy heart, and shalt cleave unto her and none else.") and has been recently affirmed in the "Proclamation of the Family." Moreover, scriptures specifically condemn homosexuality. Leviticus 18:22 proclaims, "Thou shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination." (See also Deut. 23:17 and Jude 1:7.) The church has a moral and, in my opinion, a holy responsibility to support, encourage, and defend the definition of marriage as recorded in the scriptures.

Let me add that I was disgusted with the personal essay,

"My College Years: From the Autobiography of Levi Peterson." Where is the literary value in informing the public of Levi's youthful indiscretions and how many times he had placed his hands in a young lady's bra? I find much joy and meaning in my membership in the LDS church and would like to read some articles celebrating the Mormon faith.

G. Kevin Jones  
Salt Lake City, Utah

*Second Opinions*

Thanks for all your hard work. I think the last issue of *Dialogue*, (Vol.33, No.3) was one of the best in the entire history of the journal. It is a gift to all of us.

Frances Lee Menlove  
Depoe Bay, Oregon

Tonight my daughter called to discuss the newest issue of *Dialogue* and I realized I hadn't received mine. Either I have failed to renew, or you have lost my address. In case it is the first reason, I am enclosing my check. Please send me my *Dialogue* ASAP. My daughter refuses to lend me hers.

Ann Johnson  
Sandy, Utah

My husband and I have read through the current issue of *Dialogue* (vol. 33, no.3) several times and have been through the whole

gamut of emotions, from painful tears to wonder to gratitude. The entire collection is superb and needs to be read by every Mormon, including the church hierarchy. After reading Michael Quinn's superb essay, "Prelude to the National 'Defense of Marriage' Campaign: Civil Discrimination Against Feared or Despised Minorities," I was so deeply moved by the author's fairness and sincerity (and impressed by his impeccable scholarship) that I ordered a copy to be sent to a friend back east. I also wrote to friends in Salt Lake City, recommending that they purchase the fall issue of *Dialogue*. Each of these people wrote to me or phoned, saying how much they appreciated the essay. . .and the "wealth of resources in the author's footnotes." I have always believed that Quinn's footnotes are a generous gift to any historian; they authenticate the information in the text and facilitate further investigation.

In the face of all this, Armand L. Mauss makes a valiant effort to criticize the essay, suggesting among other things that it might be better if the author had avoided reiterating certain home-truths about Mormon history (our earlier policies regarding Blacks and other minorities, and the perceived threat we once posed to "traditional marriage" through the practice of polygamy). It seems to me, however, that in the church's own best interests, those are the very things we all need to acknowledge. As my friend commented, "If

things go they way they have gone before, we'll be eating our words in a few years."

Later I read Robert Rees' beautifully written, if painful, essay, "In a Dark Time the Eye Begins to See': Personal Reflections on Homosexuality Among the Mormons at the Beginning of a New Millenium." And I found myself shedding tears when he is describing the costs in human suffering and loneliness resulting from the kind of homophobia chronicled in Quinn's essay.

Then Clay Chandler's "The Truth, the Partial Truth, and Something Like the Truth" gives us all food for thought. His conclusion is that we need to be able to trust our leaders to truly "value individual needs, and not just the needs of the institution." This might present a challenge for those leading a worldwide church, yet it is the church's very reason for being. It represents the substance of Christ's message and what he exemplified in his life.

It is amazing how each one of the essays in this issue brings to mind the words of Jesus, teachings that can serve as a yardstick by which we might measure our own relationships with our fellow human beings. Finally, though, Levi Peterson brought some comfort to my heart, as he so often does. His "My Early College Years," so typically honest and humorous, is strangely moving in its innocence.

This issue of *Dialogue* with so many strong contributions and its timely reminder of a sad history of discrimination qualifies as one of the best of many great issues of the

*Journal of Mormon Thought*. My husband Bill joins me in expressing our appreciation to the authors and the editors.

Irene M. Bates  
Pacific Palisades, California

#### *Responding to the Response*

In your fall 2000 issue (vol. 33, no. 3) Armand Mauss responds to Michael Quinn's essay on LDS church involvement in California's Proposition 22 battle. Mauss rightly recognizes Quinn's emotional involvement in the issue. It is clear that Quinn has a vested interest in the matter, and his tone does depart from a strictly scholarly one at times.

However, to dismiss Quinn's arguments on that basis, as Mauss does, is a leap we need not make. Consider Martin Luther King, Jr.: Despite his own minority status and clearly emotional arguments for Black Civil Rights, his position was sound and his cause was legitimate.

While Mauss eventually concedes that there exist deplorable attitudes among church leaders and members regarding homosexuality, he implies that since such thinking is not monolithic, Quinn is wrong to assail it as such. In this Mauss fails to recognize that when church leaders decided to organize a moral crusade (one in which the church directed member participation) against a gay and lesbian rights issue, the church leaders

and obedient members alike became monolithic, individual opinions notwithstanding.

To say that one should not attack the church on this issue because its members hold diverse opinions on the matter is akin to suggesting that the German army in World War II was not a legitimate target because its conscripts didn't all agree with Nazi policies. Perhaps Allied troops should have stopped and engaged each German soldier in a scholarly argument to determine his position before deciding whether to shoot him?

The fact of the matter is that when the church entered the political arena on this issue, it became a legitimate and, yes, monolithic target. Members who have enlisted in the church's cause, whether out of obedience or heartfelt support, can no longer expect noncombatant status simply because they may hold divergent opinions.

Furthermore, Mauss dismisses the church's unequivocal bigotry in decades past because it was well within the national consensus of the time as though this absolved it of any accountability. Does Mauss mean to suggest then that Mormons can easily ignore selected counsel of the General Authorities because they are simply parroting secular attitudes?

The church has set itself above the secular fray; it claims to speak for God. An error as grotesque as

its earlier campaign against African-American equality taints all of its subsequent pronouncements and makes the morality of its moral crusades highly questionable.

Marty Beaudet  
Boring, Oregon

*We Can All Do Better*

My experience, feelings, and thoughts resonate with Armand Mauss' conclusion to "On 'Defense of Marriage': a Reply to Quinn," (vol. 33 no. 3):

It is . . .unfair to suggest that church leaders and others who do not accept the particular platform and agenda of the gay rights movement are ipso facto bigots or homophobes, just as it is unfair and unnecessarily prejudicial to dismiss the heartfelt claims and aspirations of homosexuals with charges of mere licentiousness, perversion, or depravity. We can all do better.

I believe, apparently with Mauss, that our church leaders' legitimate "issue is behavior, not orientation." My belief, however, and Mauss' statement that the issue is "behavior, not orientation" are not consonant with the language used by some of those church leaders.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>If the newspapers are to be believed, this use by church leaders of "homosexuality" to mean "homoerotic behavior" is not limited to Mormons. It has been heard also from the Pope on his visit to Denver a few years back.

When those leaders have used language that explicitly condemns “homosexuality” rather than “homosexual behavior” as “gross sin,” a number of my homosexual friends have felt condemned as inherently, grossly sinful—merely for having feelings they did not choose and would not have if they had a choice, and totally without regard to their behavior. Some of them have concluded that these church leaders cannot respond to their concerns with understanding, compassion, or charity. To these men, “homosexual” is the word for the orientation they recognize in themselves; it includes no necessary implication that they have ever acted on that orientation. To the extent these men value the teachings of those condemning “homosexuality,” such condemnation can only teach them to devalue themselves as children of God. It is not surprising that some choose to reject the teachers rather than believe the teachers’ message. It is not surprising that some of them seek love and acceptance where they believe they can find it. The words of our leaders condemning “homosexuality” give them no reason to believe they can find love or acceptance in our church. Perhaps the occasional repetition of condemning words could be more easily accepted if there were any significant effort to educate our people in the issues and approach of Dallin H. Oaks in “Same-Gender Attraction,” *Ensign* 25 (October 1995). I have seen no effort to follow up with education on his more careful approach to the issue.

I cannot forget the friend who would not even let his Mormon friends know when he was dying of complications from AIDS. I cannot forget the friend who could no longer tolerate life as a homosexual Mormon and so ended it by his own hand. I cannot forget the pain and loneliness of friends who have maintained temple covenants, served faithfully in teaching and priesthood leadership callings and continue to feel misunderstood and rejected by the church. In teaching our youth, I cannot use church-produced materials that perpetuate the words and voice of a past prophet condemning the “gross sin” of “homosexuality” without providing any understanding of a distinction between orientation and behavior and without regard to the probability that some among our youth are experiencing feelings of homosexual orientation. The fact that some in our society cannot comprehend chastity and so use the word “homosexuality” to mean “homoerotic behavior” is not a sufficient excuse for the pain inflicted by words condemning orientation rather than behavior. We can all do better.

What understanding I have of the issue has been slow in coming. I am not a scholar or researcher in the area. I am not a trained counselor. I am not a homosexual. There is much I do not know. I do know from experience that it was possible in the 1950s and 60s for a bright but socially and psychologically isolated individual to grow up with no concept or knowledge

of homosexuality. I am not proud of my reaction to the first time I was propositioned by a man. I was sufficiently ignorant that he talked for a half-hour before I understood. I was sufficiently shocked, when I understood, that I reacted by hitting him hard enough to throw him across the BYU music practice room in which he had interrupted me. Even now, more than 30 years later, if I could remember that man's name and knew where to find him, I would ask his forgiveness. I would like to think that I can do better.

Eventually, certain college friends came to me for help in evaluating proposed cures for "homosexuality," including primal scream therapy. I had no expertise and no knowledge in the area. These people merely trusted my perceived intelligence, my willingness to read, my friendship, and my concern for them as individuals. Their trust and my concern were enough to get me past my earlier reaction so that I could begin to learn. In the end, I learned nothing that helped these friends accomplish their desired change of orientation. None of the therapies they attempted and no cumulative prayers succeeded in making the change.

At that time I was a teaching assistant in the BYU Philosophy Department. My first acquaintance with an institutional response by the church to the issue of homosexuality came from a conversation with one of the professors. He came to the office late one evening, obvi-

ously exhausted, and volunteered this explanation. He had just spent over two hours in a high council "court," considering the status of a young man who had "confessed" to a homosexual orientation and had never engaged in any unchaste activities with anyone. At the beginning of the proceedings, this high counselor was the only one of the stake presidency and high council who did not believe they were compelled to excommunicate the young man. At least for that day, this high counselor had persuaded them to take no action; the effort had been exhausting.

That early 1970s level of understanding by local church leaders has not entirely changed. As a high priests group leader I found myself participating more than a couple decades later in a group meeting discussion which wandered into the topic of homosexuality. Some believed that all persons of homosexual orientation should be immediately excommunicated whether or not they were chaste and held temple recommends. They could not accept the fact that there actually were such persons serving in bishoprics and on high councils. Others believed that orientation alone is nothing the church has any right to condemn. It quickly became clear that, had I tried to guess these men's beliefs, I would have guessed wrong. I had occasionally applied to these men in my thoughts categories such as "iron-rod" versus "liahona," conservative versus liberal, fundamentalist versus scientifically oriented. None

of those categories and none of my knowledge of these high priests' individual personalities and attitudes provided an accurate guide to guessing their beliefs on this subject. Instead, their beliefs seemed to be related to whether they had had any personal experience dealing with homosexual friends or loved ones and seeking to support them in their efforts to live the gospel while finding a way to live in this world. At least some of those without such experience had never been taught anything about the subject other than generalizations couched in language condemning "homosexuality" itself rather than inappropriate sexual behavior. It does not appear that our high priests group as a whole is prepared to do better, but I was pleased to learn unexpectedly that some already do well.

Years after my experience trying futilely to help my college friends accomplish the change they desired, I learned of Kinsey's finding that sexual orientation was a range rather than a dichotomy.<sup>2</sup> For some I know, this has been a liberating idea—at least for those few happily married husbands and fathers who have hinted to me of their being occasionally troubled by a homosexual thought or desire. For those who are somewhere in the middle of the range and have some sexual attraction to

both the same and the opposite gender, environmental influence seems to have a greater effect on which attraction is experienced more often. Intuitively, those in the middle have a wider range of possible sexually fulfilling behaviors than do those near either end of the spectrum. Even Michael Quinn refers to "the small minority of Americans who *define* themselves as homosexual."<sup>3</sup> (Emphasis added.) I wonder how large a role self-definition plays in determining orientation. It appears, at least in other matters, that what we choose at any point to believe about ourselves can have an influence on the further development of personality. A young person with some homosexual feelings lacking the concept of sexual orientation as a range may be inclined to apply one of the alternative dichotomous labels to him or herself prematurely. If in fact such a person were in the middle of the range, such self-labeling might affect choices of environments and experiences in ways that presumably could reinforce the choice of a label rather than open up other possibilities. While such self-definition might play a significant role for some, for many it seems to be largely irrelevant. For those near either end of Kinsey's range, it seems rather that the process is more one of self-discovery.

<sup>2</sup>Mauss cites Alfred C. Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, and C. E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1948) for this idea.

<sup>3</sup>"Prelude to the National 'Defense of Marriage' Campaign: Civil Discrimination Against Feared or Despised Minorities," D. Michael Quinn, *Dialogue*, vol. 33 no. 3, Fall 2000, footnote 2.



It may be that only a small group of those who define themselves as homosexual might have defined themselves as heterosexual (or vice versa) if they had had different educational and environmental influences in the formative years. Still, I wonder how one can responsibly teach any group of young men about sexuality, not knowing who among them may experience occasional homosexual feelings or may have never experienced heterosexual feelings. I have never heard of these issues being discussed with our young men. I have seen and heard of only one brief discussion in Sunday School of the requirement of Christianity that we respond to apparent homosexuals in a charitable way—that, regardless of their choices of behavior or lack of ability to choose orientation, our homosexual brothers are just as significantly our “neighbors” as are those who are heterosexual. That discussion was not planned, but was prompted by the homophobic remarks<sup>4</sup> of one of the young men in the class. How are young men struggling with issues of personal orientation to find understanding or learn to feel that the issues can be discussed with their church leaders if homophobic remarks are tolerated, misleading word choices by our lead-

ers are repeated, and educational efforts are lacking? How can we justifiably leave all such education in Christian behavior to parents? Is there any reason to suppose that Mormon parents generally understand the issues? Perhaps they need to be taught. I believe we can all do better.

Quinn’s considerable abilities in research, analysis, and documentation are obvious in his work. Less obvious is the degree to which his exercise of those abilities is marred by his agenda. In discussing the nature of Quinn’s critique, Mauss has aptly and sympathetically pointed out some of those errors. Others have been less sympathetic. I recall one letter to an editor pointing out numerous errors and contextual problems with respect to Quinn’s book *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans*. There have been other challenges to Quinn’s scholarship on the subject as well. I have not yet discovered Quinn or anyone responding to these challenges except by denigration, e.g. of the F.A.R.M.S. review (which, indeed, has problems of tone and analysis similar to Quinn’s), or by bald assertions that his work is “impeccably researched. . . .”

Neither Quinn nor a copy writer remarking. . .hyperboli-

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<sup>4</sup>It has seemed to me, though entirely without support in any research I know of, that much of the little homophobia I have had occasion to observe in male acquaintances finds its origin in fear—fear of the unknown, the different; fear of being perceived as a possible sexual object when they would rather be the perceiver of others as sexual objects; fear of the possibility of homosexual feelings in themselves and of the resulting personal and social issues.

cally on Quinn's "impeccable research" seems likely by such writings to have any positive effect on our church leaders or on our church's or society's learning to love or accept our homosexual brothers and sisters. Neither the remarks of church leaders (local or otherwise) condemning "homosexuality" rather than "homosexual behavior" nor the church educational materials perpetuating such miscommunication seem likely to increase the ability of church members generally to deal with our homosexual brothers or sisters with Christian charity. Nor do such remarks appear likely to help those struggling with the issue personally or with friends or loved ones to have trust in our leaders' understanding or compassion. I hope we will all do better.

Jim Rasmussen  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

*Dismissing the Dismissive*

I respectfully suggest Bro. R. Forrest Allred (vol 33, no. 3, vii) together with his named champion Steve Oakey (vol. 33, no.1: xix), both "dismissing the Ostler/Sears quagmire," read—or reread—my published letter in that same issue articulating the central importance of human free will to Jesus' Gospel, the classical problem of theodicy, as well as LDS theology's singular and incomparable ability—per Ostler and contrary to

any other Christian theology on this Planet—to solve completely theodicy's otherwise insoluble problems.

I suppose it's proper for *Dialogue* to publish such "dismissive" letters as those by Allred and Oakey, but all such publication shows is that some people (even LDS) haven't the foggiest idea of what is truly at stake in the important so-called "Ostler/Sears quagmire," a very real quagmire stemming from orthodox Christianity's erroneous formulation of the "infinite" God and the mistaken "solution" in both Catholicism (St. Augustine) and Protestantism (Luther) that emphatically and disastrously characterizes mankind as being without free will.

Dialogue is above all, the product of human free will. It teaches us especially when we're mistaken.

Gerry L. Ensley  
Los Alamitos, California

*Reason beyond Logic*

In his "Philosophical Christian Apology Meets 'Rational' Mormon Theology" (volume 33, number 3: 66-95), L. Rex Sears astutely points out the incompatibility of the traditional ontological and cosmological arguments for the existence of God with the Mormon understanding of God. He may have also noted the incompatibility of those arguments with the average Christian believer's un-

derstanding of God. The God derived from those arguments must exist outside of time. Feeling, planning, passing judgement, and answering petitionary prayer are all activities that can only take place in time. As physicist Paul Davies (1995 winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion) notes, a timeless God "cannot be a personal God who thinks, converses, feels, plans, and so on for these are all temporal activities. . . . There is thus a grave and fundamental difficulty in reconciling all the traditional attributes of God." (*God and the New Physics*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983, 134.) The Mormon God is far closer than the philosophers' God to the divine father loved by the Christian faithful. If it is unfortunate that Mormon apologetic cannot avail itself of some of the traditional arguments of Christian academic philosophy, one can argue that it is also unfortunate for Christian academic philosophy that it cannot avail itself of Mormon apologetic.

Yet Sears uses Mormonism's incompatibility with Christian academic philosophy to argue that there can be no "rational" Mormon apologetic while he seems to accept uncritically traditional Christian philosophical arguments. I have not had the advantage of reading the full dissertation from which he derived his *Dialogue* article. However, on the basis of the article, I believe that he overstates his argument by using too narrow a standard in ex-

amining whether Mormon theology is "rational."

The substantial first part of the article reiterates traditional arguments for the existence of God from reason alone as most famously formulated by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. This form of argumentation seems to be Sears's standard for what constitutes "rationality" in a theology. However, there are other standards that could be reasonably (!) used in determining whether a philosophical system is "rational." One of these is the modern scientific worldview that measures arguments by their power to explain our experiences. Another modern approach is to ask whether a philosophical system is internally coherent and consistent in addressing significant questions.

This latter approach appears to be the standard that the Mormon theologians cited by Sears used in their endeavors. At least to John A. Widtsoe, a "rational" theology is "an exposition, it is not an argument." His purpose was to explicate the restored gospel "to show [its] coherence, reasonableness, and universality" not to "correlate the doctrines discussed with current philosophical opinions." (*Rational Theology*, Salt Lake City: Signature, 1997 [reprinting 1915 edition], iii.) As Sears notes, some of the language of the traditional arguments attempting to prove the existence of God by an appeal to reason alone seems to have drifted into the work of the early Mormon theologians. However, these refer-

ences are only incidental when compared with those theologians' far larger purpose, which was to organize the myriad, disconnected revelatory insights received from Joseph Smith into an exposition that is internally coherent and addresses the vital questions of the modern seeker. Can one not find their labors to be "rational" even if their project was different from that of Aquinas?

Further, the Thomist arguments for the existence of God are hardly the whole of the philosophy of religion. Is Sears suggesting that Mormon theology's incompatibility with some of those arguments means that Mormon theology then has nothing reasonable to say about a host of other important questions addressed by "philosophical Christian apology"? More even than the contradiction between the philosopher's timeless God and the believer's personal God, the problem of evil looms as a far more pressing issue in our modern age than proving the existence of a God from abstract syllogisms. Is Mormonism's powerful theodicy to be dismissed because its God cannot be proven from the arguments of medieval logicians?

Another standard of "rationality" informs the modern scientific worldview, for which explanatory power is the goal, not obtuse ratiocination disconnected from external experience. In attempting to prove the existence of God from reason alone, the Thomist arguments (whether offered in traditional Christian forms or in most

Mormon variations) all in the end invoke a "god-of-the-gaps." "God" is defined crudely as that which causes phenomena for which there is no other explanation. As modern science produces non-theistic explanations for phenomena, the space for this God of the ontological, cosmological, and other philosophical arguments recedes. For example, most of Reverend Paley's examples in *Natural Theology* for the argument from design involve biology, and were considerably undermined, as Sears notes, when Darwin offered a good alternative materialist explanation.

However, Sears ignores a fascinating recent rebirth of the argument from design in the domain cited by Alma (and largely dismissed by Reverend Paley)—astrophysics. Briefly, modern cosmology recognizes that the big bang event could not have yielded a universe hospitable to complex life forms if numerous physical constants had not been "fine-tuned" to incredibly precise values which so far do not derive from any theoretical formulation. To cite one example from the most outspokenly atheistic of the prominent cosmologists, Steven Weinberg, a life-supporting universe would not have existed if the values of the primeval vacuum energies had differed by as much as one part in 10<sup>120</sup>. (*Scientific American*, October 1994: 49.)

Of course, this and many other cases of universal physical constants which are "just so" as to make complex life possible do not

logically “prove” that there is a divine designer. Nor, as Sears and apparently Roberts note, do they necessarily tell us anything about the characteristics of such a designer. However, they do give new force to the use of the argument from design which Sears attributes to the *Lectures on Faith* and to B. H. Roberts, which is—as a supplement to faith in God—initially derived from other sources. Moreover, I would argue that this modern version makes the argument from design more useful to Mormon apologetic than Sears admits, for it implies that the divine designer wanted a universe capable of supporting complex life forms. Alone among religious dogmas, Mormon cosmology explains why God(s) would form a life-sustaining universe (see Moses 1:39). This insight does not prove the existence of the Mormon God syllogistically, but it does give Mormon cosmology explanatory power, which is the standard for scientific rationality.

The deficiency of Sears’s narrow standard for rationality is most telling in his discussion of what he calls the argument from spiritual witness. As Sears notes, this is the foundation of most Mormons’ belief. In Mormon theology it is the primary source of knowledge about the most important truths. Widtsoe states that “those who can not feel and in part commune with the Holy Spirit are blind to the larger part of the universe” (*Rational Theology*, 72). Although Sears’s argument is un-

clear, it seems to consist of two propositions.

The first proposition is that revelation must always be rejected as a basis for belief because it is not perceived clearly or uniformly. It is true that inspiration of the Holy Spirit is an internally perceived phenomenon, which limits its applicability to a general argument that seeks to require others to accept what the proponent has perceived. However, Sears’s conclusion does not necessarily follow from that premise. Even if a personal inspiration is not argumentatively binding on others, it does not follow that inspirations are, therefore, invalid to the person who perceives his or her own as convincing. Also, as noted above, purely logical arguments from reason alone are not the only form of “reasonable” theology. Sears is right that ultimately the foundation of Mormon apologetic lies outside logical argumentation from reason alone. However, in this sense, so does all of modern thought. Just as the modern scientific worldview has rejected the Greek notion that natural phenomena could be understood by reasoning alone without experimentation, so Mormonism rejects the Thomist notion (derived from the Greeks) that theology can be understood on the basis of reason alone without the spiritual experimentation which leads to revelation.

Sears’s second proposition questions the validity of spiritual witness as a basis for belief because such belief may be self-in-

duced. His principal point of attack appears to be the teaching in Alma 32:27 that the search for belief must begin with a desire for belief. Initially he appears to argue that any belief thus derived is invalid because it is "circular." The limits of the use of pure logic without regard to experience as a standard of rationality are well illustrated here. Circularity is a concept of logic. However, spiritual witness is an experiential, not a logical, proof. A billiard ball will go in the corner pocket if hit at a certain angle with a certain spin and velocity regardless of my desire that it do so. In modern scientific thought, the desire of the experimenter that an experiment produce a certain result does not effect the validity of the result. One can suspect in such a case that the experimenter's bias might have impacted the experiment. However, the correction in that situation is for others to repeat the experiment, not to reject the result out of hand as a matter of logic alone.

Indeed, Sears's argument against the validity of spiritual witness undermines not only Mormon apologetic, but any Christian apologetic that relies on biblical, mystical, or spiritual authority, for his arguments against Mormon spiritual witness are equally applicable to any form of religious belief based on communion with the divine. Although not necessarily framed in Mormon-style terminology, does any Christian believer have any other basis for faith in the Incarnation or the Res-

urrection? Does Sears reject all propositions of Christian faith for which he cannot make an argument from reason alone? If so, of what use is philosophical Christian apology if it eliminates all of Christianity except the reasonings of the scholastics?

Sears's only proper argument against spiritual witness is that psychology provides an alternative explanation. However, he appears to leap immediately to the assumption that we should accept this as some kind of given logical proposition that requires no further examination. I will grant that many in the secular world would accept this proposition as uncritically as Sears does. However, this proposition lies in the realm of science and evidentiary investigation, not abstract philosophical argumentation. Reverend Paley's examples of divine design in living things did not fall out of favor simply because Darwin suggested an alternative explanation. They fell out of favor because Darwin's explanation comported over time with an enormous amount of evidence.

Unfortunately, the psychological investigation of religious experience is highly undeveloped compared to Darwinian biology, and unlikely to receive much proper attention, given the secular bias of the modern social sciences. Further, as noted above, because it is internally perceived there is an inherent difficulty in subjecting spiritual witness to external experimentation. Nonetheless, the possibility of an explanation does not prove

that explanation, and spiritual witness remains inherently a matter of experience, and thus ultimately beyond Sears's abstract logic. Those of us who have gone through the exercise of seeking a spiritual witness know that beginning with the "desire to believe" in no way dictates the subsequent experience, which is so often full of unyielding doubts, unexpected turnings, and unsought enlightenments. Indeed, even more attenuated motivations for making the "experiment upon my words" have led to positive results—we all know converts to the LDS church who started out intending to prove it wrong. Personal observation indicates that a desire to know can be sufficient. Certainly sufficient to permit us to discover what to believe, which is where I believe God wants us.

And, please, no wisecracks about how Mormon it is to end with a testimony.

James W. Lucas  
New York City

#### *A Discourse on Method*

I was a graduate student at Stanford in 1965 when Wesley Johnson, then on the faculty there, visited with me one day about a publication that would appeal to and possibly help the spiritual stability of some intellectual members of the church. By fall, Wes and Gene England were already well on their way to developing *Dialogue*. My major concern

since then, voiced later also by Lowell Bennion, has been that some who write for *Dialogue*, *Sunstone* and other similar publications will fail to show that degree of wisdom and balance needed to approach truth, and won't handle their topics with the kind of humility and fairness required to come up with an accurate portrayal of the church, its history, and leaders.

To illustrate, I'm going to draw on an old discussion. In your Spring 1999 issue (vol. 32, no. 1, 91) Glenn Hettinger attempts to vindicate Fawn Brodie's disputed claim of a sexual relationship between Thomas Jefferson/Sally Hemmings, and thereby to discredit Louis Midgley's evaluation of Brodie's scholarship. Hettinger notes the apparent match between Jefferson's paternal uncle's DNA and that of the descendents of Sally Hemmings. This clearly frames the issue, but it would have been fairer had he also raised the possible explanations for this circumstance other than the one Brodie put forth.

It would be well for historians and others not to jump to conclusions until a sufficient body of evidence is in. If history is held to the same standard of integrity as science, then we will probably never know precisely the truth about the Jefferson-Hemmings relationship. In science, truth is only approached, never really established. Scientific discoveries well grounded in data through the correct use of the scientific method have

yielded much, but there is still a possibility that some other variables not yet known will move a given theory just a little closer to the truth—or perhaps even in another direction. Science gets closer to the truth by eliminating as invalid alternative possibilities, until the evidence seems almost overwhelming that when A is found, so is B or, more powerfully, A is a cause of B.

History, in its own way, faces the same burden of identifying and eliminating possibilities that are at variance with an author's thesis or interpretation. Brodie believed 1) that Thomas Jefferson had a long-term sexual relationship with Hemmings and 2) that there was no prior marriage covenant of any kind legitimizing this relationship. Let us look at these two "hypotheses" in relation to "truth."

First, to prove the existence of a long-term sexual relationship between the two, valid, incontrovertible primary-source evidence is needed. Seeing two people in one another's company, even knowing they are or have been alone together in a room, does not constitute such evidence. Perhaps legitimate primary witnesses saw them together and assumed they were having sexual relations. It is almost impossible, however, to verify that such activities actually took place, since nobody appears really to have witnessed what went on between them in private.

Assuming that having been alone with someone other than one's spouse constitutes valid evi-

dence that illicit sexual relations have taken place would put millions of men and women, then and today, under a ridiculous burden of presumed guilt. Even if such action has a potential risk and precautions should be taken to avoid improper behavior, a presumption of such behavior would render private, transgender conversations or meetings virtually impossible in any setting.

To validate Brodie's thesis, Hettinger would have to demonstrate from the DNA testing that Thomas Jefferson himself, not just someone male from a pool of blood relatives, was the biological father of Sally Hemming's children. Does this assurance exist? Not yet, certainly. I am not necessarily saying that Brodie's assertion is false or that the child is not Thomas Jefferson's, but only that it is early to start making categorical pronouncements. Sufficient proof is lacking.

Second, for the sake of argument, let's concede the relationship. Are there alternative explanations that allow Jefferson's personal integrity to remain intact? Suppose that Jefferson was indeed drawn to Hemmings and would have preferred to legitimize this interest openly through formal marriage. At that time, such a move would have been legally impossible and politically suicidal. Suppose that Jefferson, however, had managed to make a private, binding, even religious contract with Hemmings, a marriage, and kept it secret and then carried on with her as best



they could as husband and wife. Of course, there is no first-hand evidence at all for this hypothesis, but also no less evidence than for his alleged affair. So why hasn't anyone jumped to this conclusion, which is far more consistent with what we know of Jefferson's character in regard to sexual morality?

This brings us to Joseph Smith, who was likely Hettinger's major interest in writing his article. If what Fawn Brodie says about Joseph Smith's sex life is accurate, then he acted in opposition or disobedience to the very principles of morality he outlined and preached as part of the restoration. There are clear guidelines in Doctrine & Covenants, 42, for example, that not only is adultery unacceptable but lust as well. Could Joseph Smith have espoused these principles as ardently as he did and at the same time done what Fawn Brodie accuses him of doing? Those "primary witnesses" who accused him of this, given their estrangement from the prophet and the church, are no more and no less credible than the Pharisees who inferred indirectly that Jesus was guilty of immorality because he spent time with sinners.

Joseph Smith was in a very difficult social position as leader of the church. He was young, vibrant, handsome, and charismatic. Women who were filled with happiness as a result of the Gospel must have been extremely grateful to the prophet, and it would seem strange indeed if many had not wanted to express verbally, per-

haps even with hugs of appreciation, these feelings. How rewarding but awkward it must have been for Joseph Smith to be on the receiving end of such adulation.

Of course, men and women in the church need now, as they needed then, to be circumspect in their actions toward others to whom they are not married, and there is no evidence that Joseph did not follow this guideline. How many personal priesthood-type-interviews conducted by the Prophet Joseph Smith could be seen by some as sexual encounters, without any corroborating evidence? We take precautions today as they must have then. Since I, who am less worthy than Joseph Smith, have never had sexual relations with anyone other than my wife and have counseled in private with many students as a teacher and a bishop, I can assume with even greater assurance that neither did Joseph Smith act improperly with any woman. Those who believed then that plural marriage was not decreed of God showed ignorance of Old Testament prophets and their lives. Since Joseph Smith was commanded to institute the practice, he was perfectly justified by the Lord in taking other wives and having relations with them.

My own experience with *No Man Knows My History* leads me to believe that Fawn Brodie was often not discerning, wise, or fair in her use of primary sources and that, as historian friends have pointed out, she took statements out of context

to make her point, ignoring the larger significance of the historical text she used. After reading Bernard DeVoto's copy of the work, noting his affirming comments in the margins, but examining closely Brodie's references and footnotes, I came to the conclusion that she seemed either unable or unwilling to discriminate between valid and suspect primary sources. It is little wonder that her psycho-historical account was driven by her beliefs and not by the facts.

In reading other assertions about Joseph Smith's character, I thought to myself there are other explanations for the situations Brodie has laid out, explanations more in keeping with the character of the prophet and his teachings. It was in this exercise that I came to

believe that accounts about Joseph Smith usually give us a much greater insight into the author than they do into their subject. Fawn Brodie's preoccupation with sex may tell us far more about her than about him.

We get down, of course, to whether one has a testimony of Joseph as a prophet. If he was one, his thoughts, feelings, words and actions did not need to be perfect, but they must have remained within the bounds the Lord has set for a prophet to retain the mantle of office. I believe Joseph Smith and all his successors down to Gordon B. Hinckley are prophets of God.

Phillip C. Smith, Ph.D  
Laie, Hawaii