

Boring!!!

I feel sad that *Dialogue* has lost its appeal. I'm a good barometer and believe I'm reflecting a systemic problem: not provocative, not thoughtful, not courageous. . . . I will review the magazine at the library, and if it improves to the old ability, I will renew.

R. Gallagher
Salt Lake City, Utah

The Problem of Miracles

R. Dennis Potter's "Finitism and the Problem of Evil" is the finest essay I have seen on the subject yet. I wish he had also dealt with the existential problem of evil, but as he said, that is not truly a philosophical problem.

Lately, I have found the problem of evil to be less engaging than what I call the problem of miracles. Potter briefly touches on the subject, but does not go into much detail. Briefly stated, the finite God of Mormon tradition can and does perform miracles. If God is wholly good and has the ability, he could and should eliminate many evils present in the world today. So why are miracles so uncommon if God has the power to eliminate these evils and wants to minimize the amount of evil in the world?

Potter's response makes a beginning toward answering this question. I can grant we do not know what evils are soul-building. However, whether an evil is the consequence of free will seems irrelevant to me. Suppose I

come upon a robbery in progress, and I intervene to prevent injury to the innocent victim. Have I thereby interfered with the criminal's free will? I think not. Likewise, free will should not, therefore, prevent God from deterring or minimizing evil done to innocent bystanders because of a person's free will.

Additionally, while the case of the over-burdened doctor may address the logical problem of miracles, it does not help the evidential problem. The problem here is that the doctor will use rational principles in deciding what lives can be saved under the circumstances. If the doctor is repeatedly placed in such situations, we can discern how he decides. Indeed, the medical community has developed a system for that purpose. Similarly, if God is rational, then we could probably discern such a pattern with miracles.

This is certainly not the case. Despite our attempts to discern when a miracle is forthcoming (based on such things as faith, worthiness, paying tithes), miracles, if they occur, seem to be utterly random. They happen or fail to happen to people of different faiths and to those of no faith. Surely alleviating a famine or preventing the Holocaust should take precedence over an individual's withered hand or cancer!

We could assume God is irrational or not wholly good. With either possibility, the case of the over-burdened doctor would fail in solving the logical problem. In the latter case, we need no longer suppose God is finite, since if God is not wholly good, then the problem of evil goes away without further

positing he is finite. Presumably, preserving God's omnibenevolence is the point of finitism.

Timothy A. Griffy
Phoenix, Arizona

Rescued

At first I thought that Egyptologists Robert K. Ritner¹ and Edward H. Ashment² had dropped the Book of Abraham deep into a dark hole. But along came Bradley J. Cook³ to rehabilitate the work, using the Robert Patterson "Green Eggs and Ham" method⁴ so dear to Hugh Nibley. Now surely the church is busy printing copies of the *Pearl of Great Price* to be distributed free by the missionaries. Watch for TV ads.

Rustin Kaufman
Rexburg, Idaho⁵

Rare Combination

After reading your recent issue's three very instructive essays on "The Book of Abraham" (see vol. 33, no. 4), I figuratively stood up and cheered. Together, they were uncompromisingly objective and, with Bradley J. Cook's addition, sensibly faith-affirming. That combination rarely occurs either in our general discourse or in most published forays on religious issues, anywhere.

My euphoria was further sus-

tained by reading the three personal essays—two by dear friends, Bessie Clark and Cherie Woodworth. (I'd already heard Bess read hers at the recent reception commemorating her and Marden's 60th wedding anniversary.) The piece by Bryan R. Warnick, whom I don't know, "The Road to Emmaus," 'made' both my Easter and Good Friday.

Thanks for an excellent issue. Gene England would be very pleased.

Tom Rogers
Bountiful, Utah

Brushes with Gene

My best and most-lasting memories of Gene England are virtually unknown to most readers. During the 1980s Gene had a faculty study on the 4th floor of the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU, away from well-meaning but pestering students, friends, family, and readers who were continually at his JKHB office, classroom, and home. It was in this humble office where many of his writings came to fruition. Occasionally the need arose for me to summon him from his study so that he could answer an important phone call at the History/Religion Reference Office. (And I was always amazed that his insightful writings could originate from a room of chaotic piles of papers!) In fact, many of these "important" phone calls were from (or to) his dear wife Charlotte, for they consisted of

1. Klaus Baer was right, back in 1968.
2. One of the copies of the Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar is in Joseph Smith's own handwriting.
3. There are Book of Abraham parallels to Islamic writings.
4. *Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 163-168.
5. A.k.a. Joseph Jeppson, Woodside, CA.

a panoply of romantic and familial endearments.

For me, the Mormon Literature class I took from him in the 80s, an enlightening evening with his family and friends, and my association with him and *Dialogue* for over 20 years were also meaningful, but these “little” brushes with Gene are what I will remember most about the inspired proponent of quintessential causes and eternal ideas.

Gary Gillum
Springville, Utah

Poetry of Trust

Here is a poem I wrote for Gene England when he was in the hospital last year. Gene and I go way back. In 1964, when I had my first teaching job at Idaho State in Pocatello, I wrote a poem called “To Joseph Smith” and sent it to my childhood friend, the poet James McMichael, then in grad-school at Stanford. Jim showed it to the only Mormon he knew—besides me—his fellow grad-student Gene England.

“Who is this crazy guy?” Gene wanted to know. He liked the poem, and I loved his response. And so we became acquainted without being acquainted. “To Joseph Smith” was later published in one of the first issues of *BYU Studies*.

The next year, 1965, I was back in grad-school at USC. I don’t remember how, but I heard about this Mormon journal Gene was starting, called *Dialogue*. Somehow, I was invited to contribute. I wrote a critical piece, called “The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt,” and Gene and the other editors accepted it. It was published in the first issue. Boy, was I puffed up about

that. Turns out it was the only article I ever published in my checkered academic career, and I have Gene and *Dialogue* to thank for it.

I didn’t meet Gene and Charlotte until 1967. I was protesting the Vietnam War—wasn’t everybody?—and I decided that my presence was required at the big march in San Francisco during the so-called “summer of love.” My wife and I were pretty broke, so I got a hold of Gene and Charlotte, and they invited us to stay at their place in Palo Alto. They even took care of my very pregnant wife while I marched. To say that we were impressed by the generosity and friendship of the Englands is to put it mildly.

The next year, 1968, I began teaching English at San Jose State, just down the freeway from Stanford. Wouldn’t you know, Gene immediately invited me to join the *Dialogue* staff as a book review, copy, and “letters to the editor” editor. Wow, I was runnin’ with the big dogs—Gene, Wes Johnson, Joe Jeppson. On Wednesday nights I’d drive up to Stanford and hang out with the staff in Wes’s makeshift *Dialogue* office in History Corner and pretend I was making Mormon literary history myself.

In 1969 I left the Bay Area and took a teaching job at Southern Utah State College in Cedar City (now SUU). Gene kept in touch, and for the next couple of years or so I continued to work with *Dialogue* in small ways, reviewing, editing, and attending staff meetings, which were often held at Paul Salisbury’s home in Salt Lake. I would drive up to Paul’s late at night and sleep in my Chevy van in his driveway, so I could attend those meetings. I don’t remember anything that was done or decided or if I ever made any contribution; but it was an honor—and great fun—to be invited.

After Gene got his degree and left

for the Midwest to teach, we were out of touch for a long time; and my relationship to *Dialogue* became that of a contributor of poetry and fiction. This relationship has continued, off and on, up to the present. It has been my privilege and pleasure to have published some of my finest work in the journal that Gene founded and loved.

In 1994 my family and I returned to live and work in the Provo area. The first week we were there I attended Clinton Larsen's funeral. I had studied under Clint during my short stint at BYU, and I knew that Gene would be there. He was. He gave me a big hug and welcomed me back to Utah. Every year after that, up to his death, he invited me to read my poetry—either to his Mormon literature classes at BYU and UVSC or at the July 24th celebration readings he hosted at Wildwood in Provo Canyon. Several times he and Charlotte invited my wife Carol and me up to the England cabin on South Fork for good conversation and ice cream. Welcome—that's how the England's always made us feel, no matter how busy they were with family or their many, many friends.

Gene and I did go fishing—once. On the “flying” trip referred to in the poem, Gene and I drove to Henry's Fork, Idaho, and back in two days; and we didn't catch a thing. Jim McMichael, our mutual poet friend, has a cabin there, and so we were—the three of us—all together for the first and only time. To be with these expert fly-fishermen—Jim the finest poet I've ever known, and Gene, the finest man—it was a thrill.

On the way up, Gene insisted we pull off the freeway for a guided tour of Downey, Idaho, his hometown. We drove slowly through the small, semi-dark streets while Gene pointed out

the co-op founded by his father, the family homes, and other places that were obviously very dear. I felt privileged to have him share these memories with me. Downey can be right proud that Gene grew up there.

When I heard that Gene was in the hospital and that his illness was grave, I responded in the only way I know—by writing a poem. Our relationship began with a poem, and it sort of ends with one, although I did see Gene in the hospital and a few times after he went home before my wife and I left on an LDS mission to California. It was there I learned that Gene had died. Although I was prepared for that possibility, it still seemed so impossible—such a loss for Gene's family, friends, the church, even the world. That sense of loss stays with me because, like so many others, I loved Gene—not only for the fine man he was, but partly because from the very first he loved my poetry and always encouraged me to keep writing. The fact that he loved my poetry, published it, and trusted my artistic instincts absolutely, is one of the reasons I have kept writing all these years. I have trusted in his trust, and it has sustained me. I have Gene England to thank—and love—for that.

More important than the poetry is the example Gene set for me, for all of us, spiritually. His testimony of the truthfulness of the gospel and of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was a beacon to me. Gene showed me that I could be an intellectual (so to speak), a fearless artist, and a humble, serving Saint—all at the same time—because that's what he was, is, and always will be.

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