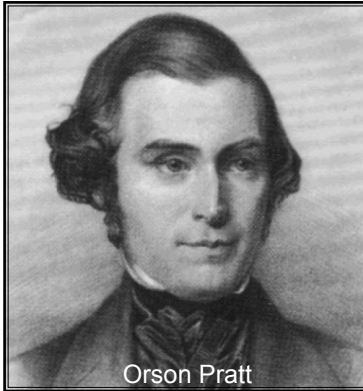


Orson Pratt's Troubles

Orson Pratt was ordained an Apostle in the Mormon Church on April 26, 1835. Because of his many writings, speeches and missionary work, Orson Pratt has been referred to as the "St. Paul of Mormonism." In the year 1874 he was appointed as Church Historian. He died on October 3, 1881.

Although Orson Pratt is recognized as one of the most influential early Mormon leaders, he had some serious problems with the other leaders.



Orson Pratt

One of Orson Pratt's biggest problems was over the doctrine of polygamy. The Mormon writer Ivan J. Barrett stated:

His most trying difficulty was over the introduction of plural marriage, and yet when he fully understood it he became its foremost advocate. He arrived home from England in July 1841, and had not been informed by the Prophet or any Church official that plural marriages were being contracted. Rumors and his **wife's accusation of the Prophet Joseph**, based on John C. Bennett's lies about the Prophet of God **wanting to take her (Orson's wife) as his spiritual wife, shocked and affected the mind of Orson Pratt for over one year estranging him from the Prophet Joseph Smith**. He was so agitated by what he had heard that at times he contemplated **suicide**. (*More Remarkable Stories of How We Got the Revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants*, by Ivan J. Barrett, Extension Publications, Brigham Young University, page 40)

The Mormon writer T. Edgar Lyon stated:

At the time Orson Pratt returned to Nauvoo . . . he had not been informed . . . that plural marriages were being contracted. When he heard the rumors afloat in the city, he was naturally astonished, **but when his wife told him that during his absence, Joseph Smith had attempted to seduce her, he was greatly agitated**. (Thomas Edgar Lyon, "Orson Pratt—Early Mormon Leader," M.A. Thesis University of Chicago, June, 1932, pages 26 of typed copy)

On page 28 of the same thesis, T. Edgar Lyon stated:

The summer of 1842 was a trying one for the professor of mathematics. With no session of school to occupy his mind, **he worried over the moral situation of the Prophet and the Church. Had he really attempted to seduce his wife?** Was Bennett telling the truth about Joseph or had Bennett really deserved to be excommunicated? If the Prophet was guilty as Bennett claimed, was he still a Prophet?

These and many other questions raced through his mind. In this mental and emotional struggle he was trying to harmonize the conception of a Prophet of God, as he had always viewed Joseph, with that of the libertine Bennett had convinced him Joseph really was. In despair, **his mind collapsed**, and he wandered away from Nauvoo. Even the Prophet realized the seriousness of his mental condition, and **fearing suicide**, acted accordingly.

On July 15, 1842, Orson Pratt was reported as "missing." The following is recorded in Joseph Smith's history:

Friday, 15 — It was reported early in the morning that Elder **Orson Pratt was missing**. I caused the Temple hands and the principal men of the city to make search for him. After which, a meeting was called at the Grove, and I gave the public a general outline of John C. Bennett's conduct. (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, pages 60-61)

Under the date of August 29, 1842, Joseph Smith wrote:

Orson Pratt has attempted to destroy himself, and caused almost all the city to go in search of him . . . And as to all that Orson Pratt, Sidney Rigdon, or George W. Robinson can do to prevent me, I can kick them off my heels, as many as you can name; I know what will become of them. . . . to the apostates and enemies, I will give a lashing every opportunity, **and I will curse them**. (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, pages 138-139)

On page 29 of his thesis on Orson Pratt, T. Edgar Lyon gives us this information:

Ebenezer Robinson, an associate editor of the *Times and Seasons*, said Pratt was found five miles below Nauvoo, in a state of frenzy, sitting on the bank of the Mississippi River.

His fellow Apostles then took up his case and endeavored to win back his allegiance to the Prophet. Brigham Young's Journal has this entry, for August 8, 1842:

(Continued on page 2)

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ORSON PRATT'S WORKS, a photomechanical reprint of the original 1851 edition. Contains the controversial pamphlet "The Great First Cause" which the Mormon people were ordered to destroy. Also contains the discussion John Taylor held with the ministers in France, in which he denied that the Mormons believed in polygamy, although he had six wives at the time. Also contains the pamphlets *Divine Authority*, *The Kingdom of God*, *Remarkable Visions*, *New Jerusalem*, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, a reply to "Remarks on Mormonism" and *Absurdities of Immaterialism*. Also contains facsimiles of the "Kinderhook Plates." This book will be bound in buckram. The quality of the printed is very good. This is a very limited reprint (only 300 copies printed). Get yours while they are still available. Price: \$7.00.

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Assisted by Elders H. C. Kimball and Geo. A. Smith, I spent several days laboring with Orson Pratt, whose mind became so darkened by the influence and statements of **his wife**, that he came out in **rebellion** against **Joseph**, refusing to believe his testimony or obey his counsel. He said he would believe his wife in preference to the Prophet. Joseph told him if he did believe his wife and follow her suggestions, he **would go to hell**.

But Pratt was **not convinced**, even though the Prophet had threatened him with hell and on August 20th, Brigham Young recorded: "... Brother Orson Pratt was cut off from the Church." The notice of his excommunication was not given the usual widespread publicity, however, and he continued to reside in Nauvoo, again occupied with teaching duties.

A meeting of citizens of Nauvoo was held July 22, 1842, and Joseph Smith said that "The object of the meeting was to correct the public mind relative to false reports put in circulation by Bennett and others, . . ." (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, page 70). A resolution was passed by the assembly which stated that Joseph Smith was a good, moral and virtuous man. Joseph Smith's history, as it is published today, assures us that this resolution was adopted by a unanimous vote:

This resolution was adopted **unanimously** by the numerous assembly. (*History of the Church*, vol. 5, page 70)

In doing research on Joseph Smith's history, however, we found that the word "unanimously" was interpolated into the text, and that it did not appear in Joseph Smith's history as it was first published in the *Millennial Star*. In the *Millennial Star* this statement read as follows:

. . . which resolution was adopted by the numerous assembly. (*Millennial Star*, vol. 19, page 615)

Further research in the Mormon newspaper, *The Wasp*, has revealed the fact that the Mormon leaders made this change to cover up the fact that Orson Pratt and one or two others voted against the resolution. In the July 23, 1842, issue of *The Wasp* we read as follows:

Resolved— That, having heard that John C. Bennett was circulating many base falsehoods respecting . . . Joseph Smith, we do hereby manifest to the world that so far as we are acquainted with Joseph Smith we know him to be a good, moral, virtuous, peaceable and patriotic man, . . .

A vote was then called and the resolution adopted by a large concourse of citizens, numbering somewhere about a thousand men. Two or three, **voted in the negative**.

Elder Orson Pratt then rose and spoke at some length in explanation of **his negative vote**. (*The Wasp*, July 23, 1842, page 3)

Orson Pratt and his wife later returned to the church. According to John J. Stewart, Orson Pratt "became chief spokesman for the Church in defense of the principle of plural marriage" (*Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, page 180, footnote 21). His wife, on the other hand, became a bitter enemy to polygamy. According to T. Edgar Lyon, Orson Pratt was not able to convince her that polygamy was from God.

In 1886, over forty years after the events in Nauvoo, Sarah Pratt still maintained that Joseph Smith had tried to seduce her:

It was in this way that I became acquainted with Dr. John C. Bennett. When my husband went to England as a missionary, he got the promise from Joseph that I should receive provisions from the tithing-house. Shortly afterward **Joseph made his propositions to me** and they enraged me so that I refused to accept any help from the tithing house or from the bishop. Having been always very clever and very busy with my needle, I began to take in sewing for the support of myself and children, and succeeded soon in making myself independent. When Bennett came to Nauvoo Joseph brought him to my house, stating that Bennett wanted some sewing done, and that I should do it for the doctor. I assented and Bennett gave me a great deal of work to do. He knew that Joseph had his plans set on me; Joseph made no secret of them before Bennett, and **went so far in his impudence as to make propositions to me** in the presence of Bennett, his bosom friend.

You should bear in mind that Joseph did not think of a marriage or sealing ceremony for many years. He used to state to his intended victims, as he did to me: "**God does not care if we have a good time, if only other people do not know it.**" He only introduced a marriage ceremony when he had found out that he could not get certain women without it. I think Louisa Beeman was the first case of this kind. If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: "**Be silent, or I shall ruin your character. My character must be sustained in the interest of the church.**" (*Mormon Portraits*, by Dr. W. Wyl, 1886 ed., pages 61-62)

Further information concerning this matter will be found in a forthcoming book entitled *Joseph Smith and Polygamy*, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.

T. Edgar Lyon claims that this incident concerning polygamy destroyed Orson Pratt's chances of becoming President of the Mormon Church. He claims that because of his excommunication Orson Pratt lost his seniority. T. Edgar Lyon states that "Had he not lost his seniority, at the death of Brigham Young in 1877, he would have been next in line for the presidency of the Church" (Thesis on Orson Pratt, page 30, footnote 2). Strange as it may seem, however, Joseph Smith's history, as it was originally published, seems to show that Orson Pratt was not legally cut off and that he was restored to his former "standing" in the quorum of the Twelve. When Joseph Smith's history was later reprinted three very important changes were made concerning Orson Pratt's restoration to the quorum of the Twelve Apostles. In Joseph Smith's history as first published in the *Millennial Star*, vol. 20, page 423, we read:

I told the **council that as there was not a quorum present when Orson Pratt's case came up before them, that he was still a member—that he had not been cut off legally, and I would find some other place for Amasa Lyman, to which the council agreed.**

In the *History of the Church*, vol. 5, page 255, this was rewritten to read as follows:

I told the **quorum: you may receive Orson back into the quorum of the Twelve and I can take Amasa into the First Presidency.**

In the *Millennial Star*, vol. 20, page 423, Joseph Smith said:

. . . ordaining Orson Pratt to his former office **and standing** in the quorum of the Twelve.

When this was reprinted in the *History of the Church*, vol. 5, page 256, two words were deleted:

. . . ordaining Orson Pratt to his former office in the quorum of the Twelve.

In the *Millennial Star*, vol. 20, page 518, Joseph Smith said:

. . . I had restored Orson Pratt to **his former standing in the quorum** of the Twelve Apostles, . . .

In the *History of the Church*, vol. 5, page 264, this has been changed to read:

. . . I had restored Orson Pratt to the quorum of the Twelve Apostles, . . .

It would appear from the way Joseph Smith's history was first printed that Orson Pratt did not lose his seniority and that he should have become president of the Mormon Church. The changes in Joseph Smith's history evidently were made to cover up this fact. John Taylor, who became the third president of the Mormon Church, was not ordained to the Apostleship until December 19, 1838. Orson Pratt had been ordained to that office more than three years before; therefore, if he was restored to his "former standing in the quorum of the Twelve Apostles," he should have been the third president of the Mormon Church.

Although Orson Pratt was finally able to accept the doctrine of plural marriage, he again ran into trouble when Brigham Young announced the Adam-God doctrine. On April 9, 1852, Brigham Young stated:

Everyone Welcome!

We are now holding a Bible Study in our home at 1350 S. West Temple, every Thursday evening at 8:00 pm. Everyone is welcome. This is not connected with any particular group or church. Attendance is open to everyone — there are no obligations connected with attendance. The scripture lesson is given by Sandra Tanner.

We feel that the answers to life's problems can be found in the Bible if we are willing to study it and apply its teachings to our lives. We have found the words of the Psalmist to be true:

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore. (Psalm 16:11)

We agree with John, who wrote:

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love if from God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God. For God is love and his love was disclosed to us in this, that he sent his only Son into the world to bring us life. **The love I speak of is not our love for God, but the love he showed to us in sending his Son as the remedy for the defilement of our sins. If God thus loved us, dear friends, we in turn are bound to love one another.** Though God has never been seen by any man, God himself dwells in us if we love one another: his love is brought to perfection within us. (1 John 4:9-12, New English Bible translation)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father **Adam** came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is **Michael**, the Arch-angel, the Ancient of Days! about whom holy men have written and spoken—**he is our Father and our God, and the only God with whom we have to do.** Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, and will know it sooner or later. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, page 50)

Joseph Lee Robinson, in his journal and autobiography (this is the journal that the apostle LeGrand Richards tried to prevent us from seeing), stated that he feared that apostle Orson Pratt would apostatize because of this doctrine:

Oct. 6th attend Conference, a very interesting Conference, for at this meeting President Brigham Young said thus, that Adam and Eve, were the names of the first man and woman, of every Earth that was ever organized, and that **Adam and Eve were the natural father and mother of every spirit that comes to this planet, or that receives tabernacles on this planet**, consequently **we are brothers and sisters, and that Adam was God, our eternal Father**, this as Brother Heber remarked was letting the cat out of the Bag, and it came to pass, I believed every word . . . our Beloved Brother **Orson Prat told me he did not believe it he said he could prove by the scriptures it was not correct.** I felt very sorry to hear professor, Orson Prat say that, **I feared lest he should apostetize**, . . .

Orson Pratt also disagreed with Brigham Young's doctrine that God himself continues to progress in knowledge and perfection. Brigham Young taught:

We are now, or may be, as perfect in our sphere as God and Angels are in theirs, but **the greatest intelligence in existence can continually ascend to greater heights of perfection.** (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, page 93)

Wilford Woodruff stated:

God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so, worlds without end. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6, page 120)

Orson Pratt, however, taught that the Gods were not progressing in knowledge:

The Father and the Son do not progress in knowledge and wisdom, because they **already know all things** past, present, and to come. . . . Now we wish to be distinctly understood that each of these personal Gods has **equal knowledge with all the rest; there are none among them that are in advance of the others in knowledge**; though some may have been Gods as many millions of years, as there are particles of dust in all the universe, yet there is not one truth that such are in possession of but what every other God knows. **They are all equal in knowledge, and in wisdom, and in the possession of that truth. None of these Gods are progressing in knowledge**: neither can they progress in the acquirement of any truth.

98. Some have gone so far as to say that all the Gods were progressing in truth, and would continue to progress to all eternity, and that some were far in advance of others: but let us examine, for a moment, the absurdity of such a conjecture. . . . Have we any right to say that there is a boundless ocean of materials, acting under such Superior laws that none of the Gods to all ages of eternity can be able to understand them? We should like to know what Law Giver gave such superior laws? . . . This is the great **absurdity**, resulting from the vague conjecture that there will be an endless progression in knowledge among all the Gods. Such a conjecture is not only extremely absurd, but it is in direct opposition to what is revealed.

99. We shall now show from the revelations given through Joseph, the Seer, that God and his Son, Jesus Christ, **are in possession of all knowledge, and that there is no more truth for them to learn**, . . . (*The Seer*, pages 117-118)

Brigham Young openly differed with Orson Pratt on this issue. In a sermon delivered in the Tabernacle on January 13, 1867, Brigham Young stated:

. . . Brother Orson Pratt, has in theory, bounded the capacity of God. According to his theory, God can progress no further in knowledge and power; but the God that I serve **is progressing eternally**, and so are his children: they will **increase** to all eternity, if they are faithful. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 11, page 286)

J. M. Grant, a member of the First Presidency, made this statement concerning Orson Pratt's teachings about the Gods:

. . . Orson Pratt lariatied out the Gods in his theory; his circle is as far as the string extends. My God is not lariatied out. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 4, page 126)

It is very interesting to note that the Mormon Church is still divided over this issue. Joseph Fielding Smith, who is now a member of the First Presidency, has sided with Orson Pratt, declaring that God does not progress in knowledge:

False notions about God's progression. It seems very strange to me that members of the Church will hold to the doctrine, "God increases in knowledge as time goes on." . . . Where has the Lord ever revealed to us that he is lacking in knowledge? That he is still learning new truth; discovering new laws that are unknown to him? I think this kind of doctrine is very dangerous. . . .

Will God destroy himself? I cannot comprehend God in his perfection having to spend time discovering laws and truth he does not know. Such a thought to me is destructive, not progressive. Should there be truth which God has not discovered, when may he discover it, and like a chemist who mixes certain elements and blows himself up, when will the Almighty find some hidden truth or law which will shatter all? Is there not a danger that some other personage may discover some greater truth than our Father knows? If such could be the case, what would become of God? (*Doctrine of Salvation*, vol. 1, pages 7, 8 and 10)

In volume two of *Doctrine of Salvation*, Joseph Fielding Smith states:

Our Father in heaven is infinite; he is perfect; he possesses **all knowledge and wisdom.** (*Doctrine of Salvation*, vol. 2, page 34)

One of Orson Pratt's most serious disagreements with Brigham Young was over the book, *Joseph Smith the Prophet*. This book was written by Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Smith. Joseph F. Smith claimed that Orson Pratt published this book without the consent or knowledge of Brigham

Young. Brigham Young evidently felt that the book was too revealing, for he ordered the first edition to be destroyed. In the *Millennial Star* for October 21, 1865, Lucy Smith's book was severely condemned by the First Presidency of the Mormon Church:

Happening lately, while on a preaching trip to Cache Valley, to pick up a book which was lying on a table in the house where we were stopping, we were surprised to find that it was the book bearing the title, on the outside, of "Joseph Smith the Prophet;". . . Our surprise at finding a copy of this work may be accounted for, by the fact of our having advertized some time ago that the book was incorrect, and that **it should be gathered up and destroyed, so that no copies should be left**; and, from this, we had supposed that not a single copy could be found in any of the houses of the Saints.

. . . It is sufficient to say that it is **utterly unreliable as a history**, as it contains **many falsehoods** and mistakes. We do not wish such a book to be lying on our shelves, . . . we, therefore, expect . . . every one in the Church, male and female, if they have such a book, to dispose of it so that it will never be read by any person again. If they do not, the responsibility of the evil results that may accrue from keeping it will rest upon them and not upon us. . . .

Many of the Saints may not know that the book is inaccurate; but those who have been instructed respecting its character, and will still keep it on their tables, and have it in their houses as a valid and authentic history for their children to read, need **rebuke**. It is transmitting **lies to posterity** to take such a course, and we know that the **curse of God** will rest upon every one, after he comes to the knowledge of what is here said, who keeps these books for his children to learn and believe in lies.

We wish those who have these books to either hand them to their Bishops for them to be conveyed to the President's or Historian's Office, or send them themselves, **that they may be disposed of**; and they will please write their names in the books, with the name of the place where they reside, and if they wish to hand them over without pay in return, state so; and if they wish to get pay for them, state whether they desire it applied on Tithing, or wish the value returned in other books. (*Millennial Star*, vol. 27, pages 657-658)

This book was later changed and reprinted by the Mormon Church leaders, even though Joseph Smith's mother had died. There were 2,035 words added, deleted or changed without any indication.

The Mormon leaders were evidently very upset with Orson Pratt, for they ordered other works published by him to be destroyed. In the same article as quoted above the First Presidency stated:

When we commenced this article, we did not think of extending our comments beyond the work already alluded to. We consider it our duty, however, and advisable for us to incorporate with this which we have already written, our views upon other doctrines which have been extensively published and widely received as the standard and authoritative doctrines of the church, but which are unsound. The views we allude to, and which we deem objectionable, have been published by Elder Orson Pratt. . . . We do not wish **incorrect and unsound doctrines to be handed down to posterity** under the sanction of great names, to be received and valued by future generations as authentic and reliable, creating labor and difficulties for our successors to perform and contend with, which we ought not to transmit to them.

In remarks which brother Pratt made in Great Salt Lake City, Jan. 29, 1860—remarks which were prompted upon learning our views respecting the doctrines that he had published, . . . he confessed that he had erred and done wrong in publishing them. . . .

The foregoing quoted ideas, . . . as advanced by brother Pratt in an article in the *Seer*, entitled "Pre-existence of man," and in his treatise entitled "Great First Cause," are plausibly presented. But to the whole subject we will answer in the words of the Apostle Joseph Smith, on a similar occasion. One of the Elders of Israel had written a long communication which he deemed to be very important, and requested brother Joseph to hear him read it. The Prophet commended his style in glowing terms, remarked that the ideas were ingeniously advanced, &c., &c., and that he had but one objection to it. "What is that?" inquired the writer, greatly elated that his production was considered so near perfect. The Prophet Joseph replied, "**It is not true.**" (*Millennial Star*, vol. 27, pages 658-660)

The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles wrote another article in which they stated:

There are great and important truths connected with the eternities of our God and with man's existence past, present and future, which the Almighty, in his wisdom, sees fit to conceal from the children of men. The latter are evidently unprepared to receive them, and there could be no possible benefit accrue to them, at present, from their revelation. It is in this light that we view the points of doctrine which we have quoted. If they were true, we would think it unwise to have them made public as these have been. But the expounder of these points of doctrine acknowledges that he has not had any revelation from the heavens in relation to them, and we know that we have had no revelation from God respecting them, except to know that many of them are **false**, and that the publication of all of them is unwise and objectionable. . . . The last half of the tract entitled "The Holy Spirit," contains excellent and conclusive arguments, and is all that could be wished; so also with many of his writings. But the *Seer*; The Great First Cause, the article in the *Millennial Star* of October 15th, and November 1, 1850, on the Holy Spirit, and the first half of the tract, also on the Holy Spirit, contain doctrines which we have felt impressed to disown, so that the Saints who now live, and who may live hereafter, may not be misled by our silence, or be left to misinterpret it. Where these **objectionable works**, or parts of works, are bound in volumes, or otherwise, they should be **cut out and destroyed**; with proper care this can be done without much, if any, injury to the volumes. (*Millennial Star*, vol. 27, pages 662-663)

Many members of the Mormon Church did destroy Orson Pratt's works as their leaders asked them to do.

Quite recently a student at the Brigham Young University (the Mormon University) told us that the library at B.Y.U. had refused to give him photocopies of Orson Pratt's "The Great First Cause." They told him that they would give him copies of a few pages but not the entire document. They claimed that it would violate copyright restrictions. Now, as far as we have been able to determine, there was no copyright on "The Great First Cause," and even if there had been a copyright, it would have expired more than sixty years ago. The student was aware of this fact and stated that he was leaving the B.Y.U. because of the narrow-mindedness he found at that school.

Within the Mormon Church there has been great interest in Orson Pratt's books. Eugene Wagner has reprinted *The Seer* by the photo-offset method. This is a very good reproduction, bound, and is available from Modern Microfilm Co.

Fortunately, James D. Wardle has obtained copies of Orson Pratt's other two books. These copies are complete (the controversial pamphlets "The Holy Spirit" and "The Great First Cause" have not been "cut out and destroyed"), and he has kindly consented to allow us to reproduce them.

The book, *Orson Pratt's Works*, is especially interesting because it contains the discussion John Taylor had with the ministers in France, in which he denied that the Mormons believed in polygamy, although he had six wives at the time.

DIALOGUE

The new magazine, *Dialogue, A Journal of Mormon Thought*, appears to be a success. Last month it was given national publicity in *Time Magazine*. In an article entitled "For Ruffled Believers" the following appeared:

Unquestioning belief rather than critical self-examination has always been the Mormon style. Breaking with this tradition a group of young Mormon intellectuals, . . . have brought out *Dialogue*, . . . *Dialogue* has opened its pages to criticism from nonbelievers . . . it represents something so unusual in Mormonism that one church leader has ominously declared: "*Dialogue* can't help but **hurt the church**." Nonetheless, *Dialogue's* growing subscription list now stands at more than 3,000, and its editors insist that Mormonism has nothing to fear from self-appraisal. (*Time*, August 26, 1966, page 59)

For subscription information write: *Dialogue*, P.O. Box 2350, Stanford, California, 94305.