
MONOLOGUES AND DIALOGUES

ON DRINKING COKE

By Robert A. Rees



THINGS GO BETTER WITH COKE.
—Coca-cola advertising jingle

COCA-COLA IS A powerful symbol in the Mormon community. For some it is the perfect private heresy. For others it is a sure sign of decadence and an indication that the drinker is on the high road to apostasy. Many more Mormons drink coke than admit to doing so, which suggests that not all Mormons are comfortable with this minor vice, this small dissonance with the Word of Wisdom. From all I can gather, quite a few Mormons drink coke or other caffeinated soft drinks casually and many would probably admit, if they were pressed, that they are addicted to it.

I have had some people tell me that a person who drinks coke shouldn't be allowed to get a temple recommend. I remember having a dialogue with some of my priests several

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years ago when I was serving as young men's president. It went something like this:

Young men: Brother Rees, can you get to the Celestial Kingdom if you drink coke?

Me: (trying to avoid a direct answer on the grounds that it might incriminate me) What do you think?

Young men: Well, we've been talking about it, and we don't think so.

Me: You mean that if you kept all of the commandments and drank coke, God would keep you out of the Celestial Kingdom?

Young men: Well, maybe you could get to the Celestial Kingdom if you drank coke, but you couldn't get to the highest degree of the Celestial Kingdom.

Me: What do you think is worse, to drink a coke or to say something unkind to someone?

Young men: (Most felt it was worse to drink a coke, but one wasn't as sure as the others.)

Me: Why?

Young men: Because its against the Word of Wisdom.

Me: (Still trying to get them to go a little

deeper) What is worse, to drink a coke or to be grossly overweight.

Young men: (Several of whom would have a spread problem in middle age) Definitely coke.

How did this little soft drink become such a powerful symbol among the Mormons? Perhaps it is inevitable that a culture that has so many prohibitions would produce an attitude that allowed for conformity to the Church's strict definition of the Word of Wisdom while at the same time providing a way around it. I know many Mormons who would never be caught drinking a cup of coffee or tea, who wouldn't even consider drinking decaffeinated coffee, but who feel perfectly okay (most of the time) drinking a diet coke. In spite of the caffeine they consume, these Mormons think of themselves as keepers of the Word of Wisdom, and in temple recommend interviews have no hesitation in affirming their obedience to this commandment. Others, the non-coke drinkers, look on such behavior as hypocritical. Caffeine is caffeine, they say, and whom do these people think they are kidding? Certainly not God. Coke is the first step on the road to ruination.

Coke drinkers defend their minor vice by saying that there are a lot worse things that the self-righteous non-coke drinkers take into their bodies without compunction. Things like chocolate, sugar, too much meat, or too much food altogether. When these people start living *all* of the Word of Wisdom, the coke drinkers argue, including washing their bodies with strong drink and eating herbs and fruits in the season thereof, then they will have room to talk. The diet coke drinkers console themselves by saying that its a lot better to drink diet colas than to be two hundred pounds overweight.

Most closet coke drinkers know that caffeine is bad for them, but so are lot of other things, they argue, so you can't be fanatical about it. They cite statistics that Utah consumes more candy bars per capita than any other state in the nation. (I don't know whether that's true, but I noticed the other night when I was in the cafeteria at the Los Angeles Temple that there was a ton of candy bars at the check-out stand.)

Coke drinkers share a certain camaraderie and they like to tell stories that show either that drinking coke is acceptable or that non-coke drinkers are pharisees. Apocryphal stories abound. There are always stories about general authorities and coke. Two that I heard involve Bruce McConkie. In the first, some missionaries come to Brother McConkie with a dilemma: they have a convert ready for bap-

tism who is willing to conform to Church standards except that he won't give up Diet Pepsi. What should they do? Brother McConkie is reported to have told them to buy their investigator a case of Diet-Pepsi and give it to him as a present at his baptism. In another story Elder McConkie confesses that he couldn't have gotten through law school if it hadn't been for Diet Pepsi. A friend who used to be a personal assistant to President McKay tells the story of being at a concert with President and Sister McKay and going to the lobby to get them something to drink. Apparently there were several kinds of soft drinks available but only Coke cups in which to serve it. He was concerned that the President of the Church might not want to be seen with a Coke cup so he went back and told President McKay what the situation was. President McKay said it was okay to use the cup and as my friend turned to go and get it, added, "Just make sure it's filled with Coke."

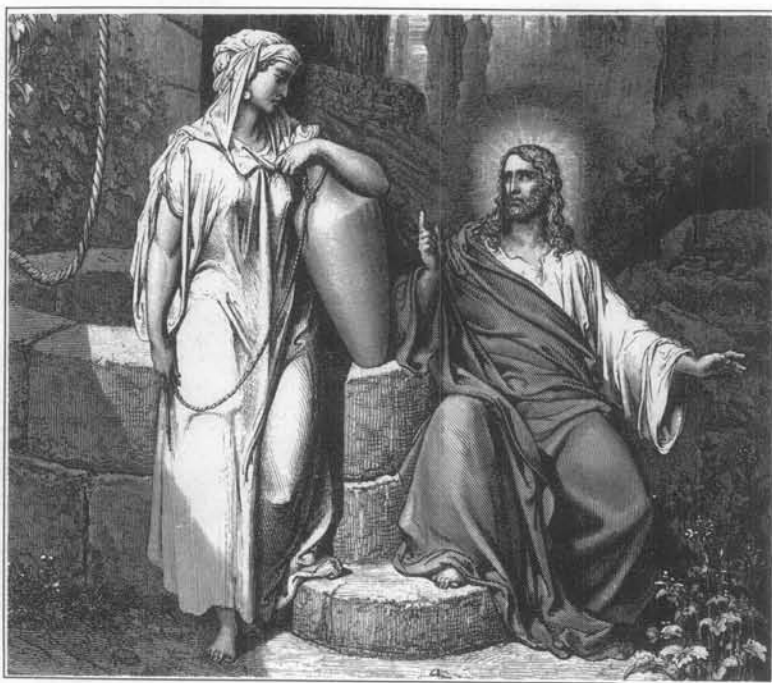
I guess the point of all this is that we shouldn't trivialize our religion over these matters; certainly we shouldn't judge one another over them. Thoreau said of John Brown, "He would have left a Greek accent slanting the wrong way and righted up a fallen man." As Christians we should be looking for ways to include others in the circle of our fellowship, not exclude them for reasons that are unworthy of the great cause we espouse. ☐



ANOTHER VOICE

THE GENDER QUESTION

By Marie Cornwall



GUSTAVE DORÉ: JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA

RECENTLY I SAT at a banquet table with Church members whom I did not know. The topic of conversation turned to women and their experience in the Church. Two questions were raised that night which I would like to address. First, why is it that women come together for women's conferences when men don't come together for men's conferences? My answer to this question is simply, "Because women want to." Women want to meet together to talk about their lives and how to respond to the challenges and problems they face. I don't think we need to justify our interest in women's conferences; they are simply something we enjoy. When it becomes important

to men that they have the opportunity to meet together to talk about their common experiences, the challenges of fatherhood, the role of men in society, or just to be with fathers and brothers and friends, they will organize and hold men's conferences. In the meantime, BYU will continue to invite members of the Church, both women and men, to the BYU Women's Conference.

The second question is a little more difficult to answer. One man, a bishop, who was concerned about the experience of women in his ward but puzzled by their many different responses to the Church, asked "What is it that Mormon women want?" The question cannot really be answered by me or by anyone else because women are individuals. Their lives and circumstances are different; their needs and desires are different. But perhaps the fact of those differences is the answer. My preference is to be recognized as an individual, not as a member of

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a category. I would rather be known as someone who loves dogs and kids and mountain hikes than as a single Mormon woman, a sociologist, or a BYU faculty member. The first description is much more central to who I am than the second.

By the same token, I grow tired of our constant attention to the "role of women in society." It is the singular noun "role" that bothers me. If I could draw I would create a cartoon. In the first frame I would picture women in a demonstration kitchen much like the kitchens we have in the home economics department at BYU. The instructor has just demonstrated how to roll a little piece of dough. She has placed it carefully in the center of her table. In the next frame we see the same roll several minutes later. It has grown in size to where it appears to be just right for baking. Then in the next frame, the instructor and other women in the kitchen look with amazed faces at the same roll, which has risen far more than it normally should. And in the final frame we see the women fleeing before an overgrown, enormous roll which is about to devour them. This is the "role" of woman.

Actually, rolls come by the dozen, and if you buy a whole dozen at a time you get a better bargain. Not only that, but you can find wheat, rye, or sourdough rolls, crescent or parkerhouse rolls. And if you really want to get complex, these days you can buy twelve grain rolls, and if you buy a baker's dozen you actually get thirteen instead of twelve. So let's not talk about women's "role," but instead let's talk about the importance of parenting, community service, scholarship, and leadership. Let's talk about who women are and what their experiences are. And then we won't need to worry about what it is that women want because we will be better able to accommodate the individual woman who is Relief Society president or wife or social worker or scientist or mother or PTA president.

As I think about the diversity of women's lives, I recall a conversation I had last fall with a woman in Cache Valley, Utah, where I had been asked to speak at a conference for the single sisters of the stake. She was assigned to introduce me. As I told her a little about my experiences, she shook her head and with a quiet sigh said, "I've got to do something with my life." Later I asked her to tell me a about herself. She said that she had cared for her younger brothers and sisters after the death of her parents and that she currently worked at Thiokol. I asked what she did there. She was employed as a technician, helping to test equipment to be used in the space program. I said to her, "It sounds to me like you

are involved in the space program. You're making the dreams of tomorrow possible, and you say you have to do something with your life? What exactly did you have in mind?"

Shortly thereafter, I talked briefly with my cousin Diane who had just turned forty. That is an event soon to come for me and we were discussing her experience. She told me she had cried all morning. When I asked why, she replied, "Because I haven't done anything."

"But Diane," I said, "You are the mother of eight children, and you feel you haven't done anything?"

"Anyone can have children," she replied.

"That's not true, Diane," I said. "Would you like me to give you a list of the women I know who can't have children, or can't have as many as they wish?"

Sisters, let's stop having these conversations. Let's stop saying to each other, "Your life is better than mine." The Lord says, "I command thee that thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife. Nor seek thy neighbor's life" (D&C 19:25). I always thought these commands referred to adultery or murder. But think about the way that second statement is phrased in the context of the first. "Nor seek thy neighbor's life." Do you covet your neighbor's life?

People frequently tell me that my life seems so exciting and interesting. It is, sometimes, but if my private struggles were as readily apparent as my public accomplishments I doubt that anyone would want to trade places with me. Sisters, do not covet your neighbor's life. You may want what appears to be her special blessings and opportunities, but life is a package deal, and it is not likely that you would be so covetous of her difficulties if you really understood them.

There is another question I would like to address. It is what I call the gender question. The gender question takes many forms, but generally it asks "what is the experience of women in this area?" or "how would we understand things differently if we compared the experience of women with the experience of men?" Why is it that we need scholarly research that asks the gender question?

Let us begin with history. For a number of years Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, and others have worked to create a history of the women of the Church. Did you know, for example, that for many years it was deemed the responsibility of LDS pioneer women to care for and to heal the sick? They accomplished this task by educating one another about effective medicines and herbs and by administering to and praying for the sick. My own great grandmother was told in a patriarchal blessing, "Thy

mind shall expand, wisdom shall be given thee and thou shalt counsel in righteousness among thy sex and in thy habitation. Thou shalt be enabled through prayer and faith to heal the sick of thy family and hold the adversary at bay that health and peace may reign in thy dwelling."¹ What a great heritage we have. Do you know the history of Mormon women? Do you make sure your sons and daughters learn about the accomplishments of grandmothers as well as grandfathers? My Grandmother McAllister made fine quilts and grew the most beautiful roses in all of Mill Creek. My Grandmother Cornwall raised chickens and sold the eggs to support two sons and two daughters in the mission field. If we do not seek out and discover the history of women, we have only remembered half the story. Do we want future generations of women to have only half the story, to wonder as we do now about Nephi's sisters, about the women who followed Alma to the Waters of Mormon?

We must be assured that when the history of South Africa is written, that the story of Julia Mavimbela is told—a story about an unassuming woman who taught the children to plant seeds, to begin to build again in a country where difficulty and strife had already destroyed too many lives, who dedicated her life to bringing the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Soweto.

What about the gender question when studying film or poetry or literary criticism? Do male writers portray women and women's lives accurately? Do male critics judge women too harshly and misunderstand the intent of their work? Can we stand by and allow male critics to judge the poetry of Emily Dickinson with observations such as "the woman poet as a type . . . makes flights into nature rather too easily and upon errands which do not have metaphysical importance enough to justify so radical a strategy?"² Don't men and women learn more about our own humanity when they read the writings of both men and women and come to understand both the common and the unique approaches of diverse authors?

And what about the gender question in psychology? Psychologists have begun to realize that theories of individual development are primarily based on the experience of men, not the experience of women. Let me demonstrate what we learn when we ask the gender question when studying development. A description of healthy teenage boys with well-developed identities suggests they are "oriented toward personal success and greater self-differentiation . . . active, growing

youths who are exploring a variety of possibilities, . . . [they] express the spirit of what they would like 'to be' . . . rather than what they want 'to have' . . . [they have a] recognition and tolerance of variation among people . . . [which] allow themselves to grow in their own direction."³ The tendency has been to ask why girls don't seem to be so self-sufficient, autonomous, and independent. But listen to the same psychologist describe healthy teenage girls with well-developed identities: "they are the most articulate and the least self-conscious . . . these are serious girls . . . who take themselves seriously. . . they are engaged in a process of valuing themselves for the kind of people they are. They are . . . attempting to discover who they are and who they want to be in relation to the significant others in their lives. . . Their girl friends matter to them as people. . . Friends are to listen to you, to share things with, and . . . to be partners in identity testing."⁴

The psychologists who did this study concluded "the single most predominant and recurrent difference found between girls and boys at this age is that girls have a far greater interpersonal focus, while the boys' identity rests more directly on their development of autonomy. . . Interpersonal ties serve not only as a vehicle for exploration of the girl's emerging sexual nature but also as a means of defining her individuality and goals."⁵

When one asks the gender question in psychology, one soon discovers that there are a variety of ways in which people develop and that the uniqueness of female development is a wonder to behold and not something that needs to be remolded so that it is consistent with male-defined models of how individuals should develop.

When sociologists recently asked the gender question, they found very interesting differences between the relationships boys form and the relationships girls form. In a large-scale study of the social networks of girls and boys in seventh through tenth grades, researchers found that four out of every ten girls surveyed selected a same-sex friend as the most significant other in her life. By comparison only two of every ten boys did so. Boys reported about the same level of intimacy with mothers, fathers, and same-sex friends, while girls reported much higher levels of intimacy with their same-sex-friends than with mothers and fathers.⁶ How can scholars ever come to understand the complexity of social institutions without asking the gender question?

If asking the gender question provides us with additional insights in the academic

world, how much more important it is that we ask the gender question in our religious communities. Perhaps we will understand what Mormon women want when we better understand how the experiences of women and men differ in the Church. Sensitivity to the diversity of experience within the Church can only occur when we are willing to seek out that which is common to men and women as well as that which is unique ☞

NOTES

1. A blessing given by John Smith, Patriarch, upon the head of Charlotte Cornwall, daughter of John and Sarah Carter born in Hampstead, Berkshire, England, June 21, 1840. Blessing No. 376. Salt Lake City, October 27, 1882.

2. John Crowe Ransom, quoted in Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 5.

3. Ruthellen Josselson, Ellen Greenberger, and Daniel McConochie, "Phenomenological Aspects of Psychosocial Maturity in Adolescence. Part I. Boys," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* vol. 6, no. 1 (1977), pp. 41-42.

4. Ruthellen Josselson, Ellen Greenberger, and Daniel McConochie, "Phenomenological Aspects of Psychosocial Maturity in Adolescence. Part II. Girls," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* vol. 6, no. 2 (1977), p. 159.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

6. Dale A. Blyth and Frederick S. Foster-Clark, "Gender Differences in Perceived Intimacy with Different Members of Adolescents' Social Networks," *Sex Roles* vol. 17, nos. 11/12 (1987), pp. 689-71.



Kropp

"Today's lesson is how to defend yourself if you forgot your rattail comb or mace."