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When the Church Starts Looking Crazy . . .

Ritual Theory: New Tools for Thinking about Organizational Behavior

What do you do when some pieces of the Church's organizational behavior have you scratching your head in bewilderment? For instance, President Boyd K. Packer's November 1996 BYU devotional on "the unwritten order of things" stresses the importance of having the first counselor sit on the right, the second counselor on the left of the presiding officer. Why is this important? Some wards won't allow deacons to pass the sacrament unless they're wearing white shirts and ties. How come? Others don't care about shirts but insist on the ties. What difference can it possibly make?

"Sometimes when organizational behavior stops making sense, it really helps to see it from a different framework," comments Lavina Fielding Anderson, trustee of the Mormon Alliance. "For our January meeting, we're inviting Dan Wotherspoon to share some insights from myth and ritual studies about how religious communities create, maintain, and change boundaries."

In May 1996, Dan received his Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate School, in Philosophy of Religion and Theology. He is currently revising his dissertation, a study on Mormon resources for ecological sensibilities, for SUNY Press. He and wife Lorri

are the parents of Alex and Hope.

"There are many theories about what ritual accomplishes," Dan explains. "One that resonates with me is the theory that ritual reenthrones the ideal when we all know that real life is messy and untidy. You can put up with the messiness if there are ways of affirming the ideal. For instance, President Packer is currently stressing, both in his BYU talk and in leadership training sessions, that the ideal missionary farewell and the ideal funeral is a meeting focused on preaching gospel principles. What ideal does this affirm for him? People who don't like this emphasis are really uncomfortable. What ideal is being shattered for them by this new ritual?"

Dan will also explain other theories about ritual, for instance, Mary Douglas's categories of "purity and danger," and Mircea Eliade's categories of "sacred space and profane space." "With other terminologies and concepts, some of the organizational behavior that seems crazy starts to make sense," he points out. "You still may not like it, but at least you can understand it."

Audience participation is encouraged at this lecture-discussion, January 15, third-floor auditorium, City Library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.



Disciplinary Councils: A Personal View

Craig Rossiter

From December 1991 through March 1995, I had an experience that was simultaneously one of the more pleasant, frustrating, educational, and difficult ones of my church life. A call to the bishopric came at a strange time, shortly after I attended my first Sunstone symposium and discovered a whole new and exciting world of Mormonism. I served as a counselor to an experienced bishop in a medium-sized city in northern California. I remember most of that time fondly.

One thing that I did not look forward to was disciplinary councils. I can recall participating in six over a three-year period. Whenever I have discussed this number with anyone, they invariably comment, "Isn't that quite a few?" It seems so to me; but given the confidential nature of these events, I really don't know. I will honor the commitment of confidentiality that I gave to the involved parties as I share my perceptions of Church discipline.

First, let me say I believe that we, as a bishopric, had the best of intentions, and I have no reason whatsoever to question the motives of my bishop in these cases. As far as I know, each person came to the disciplinary council voluntarily, as part of the repentance process and at the bishop's request. Three of the six people have moved from the area and their current church status is unknown to me; two of the remaining individuals remain active to this day. I believe that the follow-up to the council was good and that these folks have had a generally positive outcome. These experiences are not meant as a criticism of the priesthood leaders with whom I worked. I believe that this bishop was doing the best he could and that my experiences are very probably consistent with prac-

tices throughout the church.

My concerns involve two issues. I have an uneasy feeling about the difference in confessions required of men and women. And one disciplinary council that was, in my opinion, totally unnecessary, has left an uneasy feeling in my mind that sometimes decisions are made or conclusions are drawn before the councils begin.

Of the six disciplinary councils I participated in, three were for men, and three were for women. All of the men had been involved in immorality. Each of the three confessed his behavior readily but provided only enough detail to categorize the behavior.

Of the three women, two were facing charges of immorality and one had elected to have an abortion. The two women seemed to be required to relate their behaviors with much more detail than the men, details that left me with the uncomfortable feeling of intruding in very personal affairs. In each case it was clear they were sharing this information for the second time, for the benefit of the counselors. I did not understand the necessity of exposing these private and painful matters a second time when the bishop already knew them.

I was also uncomfortable with the fact that the woman was alone, without benefit of support, and was physically isolated by the room arrangement. She was seated in a chair directly in front of the bishop's desk, facing the bishop flanked by the counselors with the clerk seated in roughly the same row. I have the impression that this arrangement is standard operating procedure in the Church. Does it stem from training for bishops, or perhaps tradition? I can understand that a new bishop, handling a disciplinary council for the first time, would automatically set things up the way he had observed them as a counselor or high councilor.

As for the second area of my concern, disciplinary councils in my ward were always called "disciplinary actions." That term always left me feeling that some sort of action was going to be taken. Coupled with the knowl-



edge that the bishop had already conducted an in-depth interview with the individual, I believe that he, being human, had formed a plan of action that he felt would benefit the person the most and that meeting with the rest of the "council" was merely a formality to conform to the "General Handbook of Instructions." Being only human myself, I would probably do the same thing. But is it fair to go into a hearing regarding something as serious as someone's church membership with a predisposition to take action?

The one case where this predisposition to action was derailed by the process was a case involving a woman who had submitted to an abortion, regretted that decision, and had come to the bishop for help with her feelings. A "disciplinary action" was scheduled. I worked late that evening and almost missed the meeting. During the meeting, we learned that the abortion occurred after severe emotional and physical coercion from the woman's husband, a non-member, who was therefore immune from Church discipline. After she left the room and we began to discuss the issue, I suggested that no action be taken, that she had suffered enough from an abusive spouse and personal guilt, and that all she really needed was some comfort. The other counselor joined my argument, and no action resulted. I later learned that the handbook gave the bishop the option of holding a disciplinary council in the case of an abortion but that it was not mandatory.

These experiences have raised some questions that someday I hope to have answered. How many victims are made victims again by the disciplinary council? If the church "court" is a court of love, how does one make the experience less painful for the accused? Would it be better for a neutral "judge" (bishop) to hear the case than a bishop who has intimate knowledge of the details and perhaps preconceived opinions and predetermined courses of action? Should the member be allowed an advocate or friend to provide a measure of comfort and support during the

ordeal? What kind of training do bishops receive relating to disciplinary councils? Do they emulate the bishop they served under? How does the leadership style of their stake president affect decisions that they make? What guarantee is there that the process will be fair?

These were not high profile cases. They didn't deal with feminists, intellectuals, homosexuals, or any other "enemies" of the church. These were just normal people dealing with normal human problems. But their lives were undoubtedly changed, for better or worse. I hope that bishops everywhere dealing with these lives make every effort possible to make love, fairness, and compassion in the disciplinary process the rule, and not the exception.

ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was incorporated on July 4, 1992. Its purposes are to identify and document ecclesiastical/spiritual abuse, to promote healing and closure for its survivors, to build more sensitive leadership, to empower LDS members to participate with more authenticity in Mormonism, and to foster a healthier religious community.

By Common Consent is the quarterly newsletter of the Mormon Alliance. Comments, articles, and items for inclusion are welcome, if they are submitted thirty days before the mailing deadlines, which are the first weeks of January, April, July, and October. Please send them to Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, Mailbox 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Subscriptions are \$30 for each calendar year. At any point during the year that a subscription begins, you will receive the four newsletters of that year, the Case Reports volume for that year, and notifications about the quarterly meetings in January, April, August, and October. On request, you may receive meeting notices at no charge.

To report cases of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse, contact Lavina Fielding Anderson, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115 (801) 467-1617.

Messages That Kill

Karen J. Rijkskamp

Last year I attended a workshop on preventing dating violence and listened to a young man tell the story of a vibrant, beautiful classmate, Julie, who was popular, outgoing, a high achiever, self-confident, and surrounded by friends. After high school graduation, she began dating Dan, an older man who lavished money on her, surrounded her with love, and paid her many compliments. They didn't marry, but the relationship seemed permanent.

Friends began to notice changes in Julie. Dan would show up at work and demand Julie's immediate attention, regardless of what she was supposed to do. At his insistence, she left her beachfront apartment and moved several miles inland to be closer to him. He wanted to know everything she said, everywhere she went, and everyone she talked to. The compliments became rarer and came sandwiched between criticism of her looks, her choices, her friends, and her music. Julie saw less of her friends and began to feel that she must be wrong about the music she liked, the places she wanted to go, and the way she liked to dress. Dan's ideas were always better, and he could always explain why she was wrong.

Julie got more confused. When she obeyed Dan, he was affectionate and kind. When she didn't, there were orders, threats, reprimands, and restrictions. She began to believe that Dan knew what she wanted and liked, felt guilty about not measuring up to his requirements, felt afraid of being without him. . . .

I sat in that large workshop listening to the story of Julie with tears running down my face. No man had ever tried to manage my life as Dan managed Julie's, but her story felt so familiar. I was a devout, faithful Mormon who had spent most of my life in Utah. Now, at age thirty-nine, I didn't know what my own

feelings, ideas, desires, hopes, and dreams were. Dan's emotional and verbal control escalated into sexual and physical abuse. Eventually, Julie was found dead on the side of a road. She thought the messages meant love, but they killed her.

I was haunted by the echoes of strong, me-killing messages from my past:

Sit quietly.

Obey the person in charge.

Make the right choices.

Get the right answers.

Don't make mistakes.

See only the good in everything. Don't talk about the bad. Forget the sadness, the hurts.

Be a peacemaker. Don't cause trouble. Give in to others.

Don't trust your feelings. The natural man is an enemy to God.

The ideas of the world will lead you astray. Confine your learning to approved sources.

Choose only friends who will be good influences on your life.

Wear only modest and appropriate clothes.

Keep your hair long, because Dad likes it that way.

Listen only to the music that Heavenly Father would want you to listen to.

Read only the books that the Church leaders say are all right.

Don't ask questions. Speaking up should be done only at the appropriate time and in the proper way.

This [testimony meeting, stake camp, service project, seminary assignment] is wonderful, special, right for you. I know it will be a blessing to you.

This is the only path that will bring you happiness.

We know what is right and best for you. We have the answers to your questions, the solutions to your problems.

When you obey Heavenly Father [the bishop, your Laurel leader, your parents], you will be blessed and happy. When you disobey, you deserve to feel guilt and pain.

I feel so lucky that I survived to learn the



difference between healthy interactions and emotional abuse.

These statements, spoken by well-meaning friends, parents, and Church leaders were the best they could do from their understanding of life. However, these messages snatched my emotional control away from me and killed my spirit. They isolated me from a diversity of ideas, friends, and experience. My time was dominated by household duties and Church service. I was dependent on Church friends and leaders for all of my decisions.

I had heard these messages so many times that I believed any deviation would destroy me. It is shocking to me now that I couldn't see that it was the messages themselves that were destroying me. I have reclaimed my free agency. I now have a view of life that allows me to choose where I will go, whom I will listen to, which ideas I will accept and reject. It is now, halfway through my life, that I feel grown up. I trust myself to find my own answers.

I took away from the workshop a description of Basic Rights in a Relationship. I believe that this list applies, not only to dating relationships, but to all human interactions: adults, children, teachers, authorities, parents, spouses, and co-believers:

Basic Rights in a Relationship

The right to good will from the other.

The right to emotional support

The right to be heard by the other and to be responded to with courtesy.

The right to have your own view, even if the other person has a different view

The right to have your feelings and experience acknowledged as real.

The right to receive a sincere apology for any jokes you find offensive.

The right to clear and informative answers to questions that concern what is legitimately your business.

The right to live free from accusations and blame.

The right to live free from criticism and

judgement.

The right to have your work and your interests spoken of with respect.

The right to encouragement.

The right to live free from emotional and physical threat.

The right to live free from angry outbursts and rage.

The right to be called by no name that devalues you.

The right to be respectfully asked rather than ordered. (Collaboratively produced by the Massachusetts Prevention Center, Help for Abused Women and Children, and the Partnerships for Violence Prevention, Essex County District Attorney's Office).

Sorting Out Subscriptions . . .

All Alliance subscriptions are for the calendar year--from January to December. All subscriptions are \$30 and include four quarterly newsletters and that year's Case Reports.

Please check your address label. If it says 1996, you need to renew immediately to pay for the 1997 newsletters, of which this is the first, and the 1997 annual. You will automatically receive the 1996 Case Reports, which will complete your 1996 subscription.

Conference Critique

Mark your calendars now! On April 7, the Mormon Alliance sponsors semi-annual conference critique on¹ the Monday following April Conference. A panel of experts will "read" the five sessions just past, plus the Young Women's meeting. What soared? What sank? What were the bright points? the black holes?

All serious conference watchers and listeners are invited to share their insights about this most enduring of Mormon group rituals. Janice Merrill Allred will chair the panel, arranged by Marti L. Jones.



Another Country

Paul Swenson

We are emigrants
emerging from
a dark island,
or some shadowed
mass--perhaps

a ship?, perhaps
a great fish?--
still visible
offshore, Strange
our faces in

stone-gray morning,
profiles turned
inland. We are
treading the sod
of a new country

now forming step
by step beneath
our feet, blue
mountains swelling
in peripheral

vision. This is
the landscape of
our longing and
our abandonment,
uninhabited till

we arrived. We have
no leaders--we are
all lost, all free.
We see the space
that opens in this

wild interior, place
to ascertain what
we believe. Our
grief is for
the selves we left

behind. God will
surely find us here,
or we will find
each other. Fear
still bloats offshore.

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Inspired by James E.
Chapman's description of
the "new emerging Mormons,"
Sunstone session,
August 1996.

Volume 2 Coming Up

The Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance, Vol. 2, 1996, is due off the press by 1 April. Unlike Volume 1, which dealt exclusively with child sexual abuse in the Mormon Church, Volume 2 will contain a variety of articles and essays. Among them are experiences of missionaries whose presidents concentrated on "the numbers," the experiences of some gay and lesbian members of the Church whose efforts to open respectful and informative dialogues with their Church leaders made them into targets, and the experiences of members in dealing with ecclesiastical leaders whose requirements to "follow me" violated the members' conscience. Over half of the volume will be devoted to a documentary history of the excommunication proceedings of Janice Allred.

The 1997 volume is scheduled for fall publication. At that point, the publication schedule will be back in line with the calendar year.

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