

It's Sunstone Time . . .

The Mormon Alliance is sponsoring two sessions at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City August 6-9. One, by popular demand, is Dan Wotherspoon's lecture/workshop on ritual theory first presented in February.

Abstract: Because rituals often involve reenactments of archetypal stories, carefully articulate very specific roles, and maintain strict boundaries, the literature of myth and ritual studies is rich with insights for understanding (and making peace with) some problematic aspects of Mormon life. This lecture/workshop presents prominent theories, using them to highlight some less obvious ways that storytelling and ritualized behaviors shape Mormon experience. For example, repetitive activities can be viewed as "creative" behavior. Ritual structure contributes significantly to the message. Storytelling and ritual performance help us handle the dissonance between ideal and actual behavior. President Boyd K. Packer's devotional address, "The Unwritten Order of Things" (October 1996), and some of the program he has pursued since then will receive special attention. In keeping with its goals, the Mormon Alliance hopes this presentation will provide helpful language and possible frameworks for sharing our own stories. Dan recently received his Ph.D. from The Claremont Graduate School.

The second session sponsored by the Mormon Alliance is "A 'Loyal Opposition' within the LDS Polity: A Review of the Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance Vols. 1 & 2," by Scot Denhalter, a teacher, writer, book collector. **Abstract:** Although the reporting methods of the "Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance" may be critiqued, the ensuing debate on the "truthfulness" of a fact or set of facts would be moot. Whether a "fact" in specific case report is inaccurate, one must still admit that things like this do happen in our church. A more

profitable approach is the political notion of the "loyal opposition," a phrase the Mormon Alliance has used to describe itself. This review is intended to get to the heart of the annual Case Reports by analyzing their effectiveness as a tool for productive change. Through citations of historical and scriptural precedent, I will explore the viability of a "loyal opposition" within the LDS polity and the bounds within which such a function might express itself. I will then analyze the actions of the Church and the Alliance with the ideal suggested by these precedents.

Copies of both Volume 1 and Volume 2 of the Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance will be available at the Benchmark table, as will copies of Janice Allred's recently released volume of essays. (See article, p. 3.)

Janice will be present another in her series of important theological examinations. Lavina Fielding Anderson, with Janice co-editor of the Case Reports, has submitted proposals for two papers: The first is "A Decade of Excommunications: A 1966-75 Profile," based on abstracts of approximately 40,380 excommunication records. The second is "A Ministry of Blessing: In Remembrance of Nicholas G. Smith." Nicholas Groesbeck Smith (1881-1945), a grandson of George A. Smith, a son of John Henry Smith, and a half-brother of George Albert Smith, a bishop for ten years, three times a mission president, a counselor in the Salt Lake Temple presidency, acting Church Patriarch, and one of the first four Assistants to the Twelve. Yet the parts of these calling he embraced were not their visibility, power, or administrative prerogative, but rather the opportunity they gave him to serve. He had the gift of healing, a generous heart, a great love of and acceptance for ordinary people, and a relish for one-to-one ministrations. He should be better remembered.



The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Liberals

J. Frederic Voros, Jr.

1. Our reason leads us to conclude that God the Eternal Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost probably exist.

2. We conclude that men will be rehabilitated for their mistakes, and commend Adam for seeking knowledge in spite of authoritarian prohibitions.

3. We conclude that through emulating the character of Christ, all mankind may progress eternally, by obedience to the laws of the universe.

4. We conclude that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, faith in God-given human reason; second, repentance of blind faith; third, baptism in all good books for the remission of ignorance; fourth, laying on of hands for the gift of the spirit of learning and progress.

5. We conclude that a man must be called of God, schooled in institutions of higher education, and credentialed by the laying on of honors by those who are in authority, to explicate the gospel and administer in the mysteries thereof.

6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, teachers, theologians, historians, writers, academics, and so forth.

7. We believe in the gift of reason, self-acceptance, open-mindedness, condescension, deconstructionism, and so forth.

8. We conclude that the Bible is the word of God as far as it is understood figuratively; we also conclude that the Book of Mormon is the word of God except insofar as it purports to be the record of ancient prophets on plates of gold translated by the gift and power of God.

9. We believe all that scientists, historians, and poets have revealed, all that they do now reveal, and we believe that they will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the democracy of God.

10. We believe in the literal gathering of thinkers in conferences and symposia and in the restoration of the golden age of B.H. Roberts and John A. Widtsoe; that the University of Zion will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will study personally upon the earth; and that the earth will be renewed as a truly global village.

The Articles of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Conservatives

J. Frederic Voros, Jr.

1. We believe in the Quorum of the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, and in God, the Eternal Father. We also believe in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Ghost. We believe in disciplining those who mention God the Mother.

2. We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression, except sins committed in obedience to leaders, for which men will be rewarded.

3. We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to Church leaders.

4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in prophets and apostles; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of obedience.

5. We believe that a man must be called by authority, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to exercise authority in the Gospel and to administer in the ordinances thereof.

6. We believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, the Correlation Committee, the Strengthening Church Members Committee, the Public Affairs Department, Bonneville Communications, Zion Securities, and so forth.

7. We believe in the gifts of prophecy during the life of the prophet, revelation during the life of the revelator, authority, conformity, broadcast media, longevity, and so forth.

8. We believe the Bible and the Book of Mormon to be the word of God as far as they are consistent with the teachings of current Church leaders.

9. We believe some of what our leaders have taught, and all that they do now teach; we also regard the belief that God will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God as a sign of apostasy.

10. We believe in the figurative gathering of Israel and in the literal millennial reign of the twelve apostles upon the earth.



11. We claim the privilege of studying God (who is either almighty or all good but necessarily not both) according to the dictates of our own paradigm and allow all people not associated with the Religious Right the same privilege.

12. We believe in being subject to authors, philosophers, scientists, and artists, and in obeying, honoring, and sustaining human reason.

13. We believe in being reasonably honest, true, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all persons, though we do question the admonition of Paul--We are not deluded into believing all things, we consider it foolish to hope all things, and, although we have endured many things at the hands of authoritarian obscurantists, we hope to avoid having to endure all things. If there is anything our reason commends as virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

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.

There is both good and evil in the world, but the line separating them runs not between nations or institutions or groups or even individuals; the line that separates good and evil runs through the core of each nation, each institution, each group, and, most tellingly, . . . through each one of us. Cutting through each one of us is the reality of our own limitation. "There is a crack in everything God has made," Emerson observed, and--not the least of all--in each one of us. --Ernest Kurtz

11. We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own leaders and desire all men to do likewise.

12. We believe in influencing kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates; and in obeying, honoring, and lobbying to change the law.

13. We believe in being honest and true except as necessary to protect the image of the Church; chaste, provided however that unchastity in leaders will have no eternal consequences; benevolent to the servile; virtuous in public; and in doing good to all who praise us; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul--We believe all things our leaders teach, we hope all things our leaders hope, we have endured many leaders, and hope to be able to endure all leaders. If the Correlation Committee pronounces anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things--until directed otherwise.

ALLRED BOOK PUBLISHED

Just released in May is Janice Allred's God the Mother and Other Theological Essays (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997).

Its 268 pages contain twelve essays: "Do You Preach the Orthodox Religion? A Place for Theology in the Mormon Community," "Jesus Our Mother: The Quest for Feminine Identity," "Toward a Mormon Theology of God the Mother" (this essay originally attracted the attention of the Strengthening Church Members Committee, precipitating a long series of events that ended in Janice's excommunication in May 1995), "Anger, Sex, and Pain," "Faith and Doubt," "Pride or Self-Esteem," "Toward a Mormon Doctrine of Original Sin," "Justification and Sanctification," "If Thy Brother Sin Against Thee," "Freedom and Grace: Rethinking Theocracy," "Him Shall Ye Hear: Prophets and People in the Church of Jesus Christ," and "Equality and Diversity."

Janice earlier gave most of these essays as Sunstone papers or at the Mormon Women's Forum, but relatively few of them have been published. Copies will be available at Sunstone at the Benchmark table or can be ordered directly from Signature Books, (801) 531-0164 or 1-800-356-5687 for \$24.95.

Organizational Musings

Lynn Matthews Anderson

I believe that an organization takes on a life or character of its own, and that as with any life form (as it were), it develops and perpetuates various mechanisms to ensure its survival and/or growth. Such mechanisms are directly affected by the organization's history and by the strengths and foibles of its most influential members (past and present). The behavior of the institution can be described as "Christian" only insofar as that history and collective behavior emulates Christian behavior.

The survival/growth mechanisms of the Church were and continue to be affected by the dishonesty and power-seeking of its earliest leaders. Its character has been corrupted, and those who serve it (especially at the highest levels), no matter how personally righteous, almost inevitably fall prey to the corrupting aspects of the mechanisms in place: at some point such individuals must choose between personal integrity and loyalty to the institution, between saying and doing things they personally find out of harmony with their own consciences and acquiescence to what they have been taught is somehow a "higher good."

The only cure for a corrupt organizational character is to openly acknowledge the corruption and to fight against the corrupting elements. So the Church needs to become totally honest about itself and its history and must seek to empower not just all its members, but everyone.

The corrupt institution will strenuously resist all efforts to change it into something else. So the messengers will continue to be punished, the truth will continue to be spin-doctored, good men and women will continue to have their integrity and agency violated. GAs will continue to be "stepfordized."

I'd like to think that such necessary radical change could happen without some kind of supernatural intervention--that somehow members and leaders alike would find the courage to look at the ecclesiastical monster head-on and do what it takes to change it into something filled with love. Can we, the imperfect, require and effect perfection from the institution? Could God impose perfection without such an imposition serving as the root of yet another kind of corruption?

Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there will I be in the midst of them." Maybe that was a clue that the spirituality of any organization larger than an intimate circle is most difficult to keep unspotted from the world. We have the story of Zion to hope for, to work for as we can, but we seem to have lost our Enoch(s) somewhere.

I think resistance to corruption must start at the "lowest" levels--first of all, of course, in our own hearts. Again, if we are going to be Christ's Church, then we must make emulating Christ the guiding principle of all our policies and programs. No more Church widows and orphans. No more forcing women to be Marthas (with lipservice to Mary). No more forcing men to serve an institution at the expense of what they (should) love more. No more forcing people into roles simply because of their sex.

Plenty more putting the needs of the poor and weak first. Plenty more designing and implementing a Church program that cares for children more than adult convenience. Plenty more freely opening our doors to the larger community and sharing our resources, our buildings, and our energies. Plenty more taking on the true moral issues of poverty and discrimination and inequity in every country where Saints are found (and beyond).

Our history shows that the individuals belonging to the Church have the courage and fortitude to make any sacrifice necessary to further what is perceived of as God's work. The corrupt institution has taken full advantage of this devotion and twisted it to its own self-serving ends. Is there any way to harness this same devotion as a means of transforming the beast among us? Is there any effective way to insist upon honesty, to empower all the Saints, to turn the Church's continued (accelerated?) march toward evil into a genuine quest for righteousness, for Zion? Is there any way for the Church to truly embody the gospel? To do what is right, regardless of the consequences which may follow? (Transformations are inevitably painful, I think.) To truly be Christ's Church?

As one who has consciously chosen to take a step away from the institution, at least for a time, I obviously have my doubts. But I cannot help but wrack my brains and heart about these questions: there is simply too much of what is me, and simply too much of what I hold dear in what I grew up believing to be truth, to simply give up entirely. At least for now.



Uncommon Dissent

Gene Mahalko

When I learned I was moving to Grand Forks, North Dakota, in the fall of 1978, I looked it up on a map, having never heard of the town. It was in many ways like moving to another country, or moving back in time.

Students could easily cash out-of-town checks, as could Canadians. There was no voter registration or vehicle inspection. You were simply expected to do the right thing. The annual homicide rate for the whole state could be counted on your fingers.

State-wide Sunday closing laws were still in effect. Yes, it was partly religious, but it was mostly small towns and small businesses wanting a day off. The legislature overturned them three times but couldn't make it stick until 1991. The first two times, the citizenry placed the measure on the ballot and overturned the law.

Most people just left their cars running unattended when shopping in the dead of winter. If someone got stuck in a snow drift during a blizzard and you were able-bodied, you would stop, hop out, and push. If that didn't work, you gave them a lift, because everyone knew that while a minute or two of exposure to a -70 wind chill is uncomfortable, ten minutes can be lethal. We knew at a visceral level that there are times when we absolutely depend on each other. It was a powerful lesson.

My first winter there was horrid, even by local standards, and it ended with the worst flood on record. The volunteer labor fighting the flood was just amazing, and we beat it. But even beating it took a month out of our lives. T-shirts were printed and parties were thrown in celebration.

Now, of course, almost everyone has heard of Grand Forks. The flood and fire this spring hit a national nerve because it is our worst civic nightmare. There aren't many celebrations yet, but lots of heroes. Pat Owens had just been elected the mayor of Grand Forks. Before that, she had been the mayor's administrative assistant for over thirty years, and she ran for mayor because people said she'd been running the city for years anyway and ought to get credit for it. She showed more strength and dignity during the flood than I'm sure she had ever imagined she was capable of.

Since the flood, teams of people have been coming from as far as the Twin Cities, 300 miles away, bringing trucks, scrapers, power washers to help in the clean up, camping out on church lawns. Those volunteers deserve a tip of the hat too. Flooded houses are not pleasant places to work in.

There is still plenty wrong with the world, and floods and blizzards are no fun, but they do give us the chance to see that there is a lot of good out there that goes unnoticed until a disaster hits.

April Conference Critique

A lively panel, moderated by Janice Allred, gathered on the traditional Monday evening after April general conference, to share observations about the sessions.

Janice began by quoting President Hinckley's statement in the closing session: "Our critics at home and abroad are watching us. In an effort to find fault, they listen to every word we say, hoping to entrap us." Janice wondered: "Is he was talking about us? We're the only place, as far as I know, that critiques conference. She added, with a smile, "You'd think that President Hinckley would be pleased that someone is listening to every word--I thought that's what he wanted. But I also think he's a little ungenerous about his critics. We're critical in the best sense: we pay close attention, we analyze, we try to understand, we appraise what we like and what we don't like."

Leaving this unanswerable question behind, the panelists ranged over new developments they noticed. An unpopular one was that conference talks were not available on the internet immediately after conference.

Harry Fox, a Church of Christ minister, found it encouraging that President Hinckley urged Mormons not to be "provincial or parochial" but to find the good in others. He also noted with interest that the Church's missionary ads offered free copies of a King James Bible, not a Book of Mormon. In these two events, Harry "sensed a hint of interest in moving toward the Christian mainstream and Christian scripture."

Panelist Deana Holmes queried whether the creation of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Quorums of the Seventy would "give more autonomy to the regional churches or whether it's just another funnel to impose Salt Lake on the masses." Linda Quinton-Jones commented that this move "broadens the leadership pool. They can try out temporary leaders for a limited time and there won't be any surprises when they make lifetime calls later. A big part of keeping men active is leadership positions. In my ward, 25% of the men are in BYU wards or serving on general boards, but the fact of the matter is that if they're not needed they're not there."

The second major institutional change, the sustaining of a new Relief Society general presidency, was "really downplayed," in Janice's opinion. "Both the outgoing and the incoming presidents should have spoken in that session. The camera didn't even track the new presidency coming up to sit on the stand. What do they even look like?" An audience member commented: "And then after they sustained that list of scores of men, the choir sang, 'Praise to the Man.'"

One man in the audience commented, "The former presidency had strong personalities. I wonder if we've got women who are less independent and strong minded now."

Deana pointed out: "Sister Smoot has a background

in PR, and Sheri Dew works for Deseret Book. Possibly they'll discover that the women of the Church have serious problems, but I'm not gonna count on it."

Another man in the audience suggested: "President Hinckley has always been a publicist. That's been his whole career. That's his current emphasis. We usually hear that we're surrounded by sin and external enemies. Instead President Hinckley's Sunday morning talk said, basically, 'Now are the good times. The world is friendly. It's a time to make progress.' So many recent conferences have been fighting desperately to justify situations that are difficult to justify, including incapacitated presidents. Now he's saying, 'We've never had it so good. Let's move fast while we can.' In that context, the choice of the Church hostess as the new Relief Society president is very logical."

Asked to identify most and least favorite talks, Harry praised Neal Maxwell's talk as "down where the rubber meets the road." Least favorite was Richard G. Scott's with its concern about obedience. He also noted that although many speakers mentioned the atonement, "the implications are never drawn out. The message of the atonement is that when we did our worst to God--when we killed him--he did his best for us. We're used to a conditional bargain: when we do our best for God then maybe he'll do his best for us. But that's not what happened here. We did our worst, but he did his best. That's the gospel. That's the atonement. That's what gives you the horsepower to be obedient. That's why Peter's listeners were pricked in their hearts. What's the point of making more and more technical commandments in obediences to which we can be technically perfect, if we're missing the power that makes it all work?"

Deana also "loved Elder Maxwell's talk. I really felt what he was saying." In contrast, Elder Eyring's message "rubbed me the wrong way. It sounded as if it boiled down to 'Accept this calling because we're prayed so you

don't need to.'" Linda agreed that this was her least favorite talk as well, but commented on enjoying President Packer's "really nice talk on the atonement." Because she had been listening on the radio instead of watching on television, she had missed the announcement of the speaker's name and ruefully commented, "I'll have to do that again. He sounds much warmer if I don't see him."

Panelist Paul Tinker praised the "remarkable list of humanitarian projects around the world" reported by Presiding Bishop David Burton. "It suggested where we may be headed in one of the most positive aspects of the Church." His least favorite was Russell Nelson. "I just never got his analogy about the boat and his spool. Compared to the great exegesis he did on Matthew 5 a few conferences ago, this one didn't work. I also didn't understand why Elder Scott began his talk with the arcane reference to April 6 as the Savior's birthday. Why? What was that about?"

Janice corroborated that she had also been troubled by Elder Eyring's talk. "Basically he said God calls us through the prophets, then he talks about the prophet as though he were God." She agreed that President Packer's talk "contained many important concepts but mostly it was about being ashamed because you're unclean and the point is 'how can I be un-dirty so God will love me?' God loves us anyway. For me, the negatives outweighed the positives in that address."

One panelist commented thankfully on the absence of talks devoted specifically to the Proclamation on the Family. Most participants agreed that this conference seemed "humane, less negative and critical in tone."

The next conference critique will be held Monday, 6 October 1997, in the third-floor auditorium of the main library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. with the same format of panelists and audience exchange.

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