



BY COMMON CONSENT



VOLUME 6, NO. 4

October 2000

CONFERENCE CRITIQUE

Are body-piercing and tattooing a defiling of God's temple?

Are the sound-system and new organ in the Conference Center up to snuff (er, or up to nontobacco products that induce sneezing)?

Will the one-week delay in General Conference caused by the Olympic broadcasts impact the level of sports metaphors used in official talks?

For analyses of these questions and other timely issues addressed by October General Conference, join the hardy band of Churchwatchers at the semi-annual conference critique in the second-floor meeting room of the main library (south and east of the escalators), 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. The library block is still under construction but parking is available on the street and around the block of the City-County Building due west.

Lavina Fielding Anderson will moderate the discussion on the Relief Society and Saturday sessions of conference, while Vickie M. Stewart will head up the discussion on the priesthood and Sunday sessions.

MORMONS IN EXILE

Finding a new spiritual home was the

bittersweet message in a moving personal essay, presented at the August Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City by Marti Lynn Jones, a trustee of the Mormon Alliance.

Raised as a committed sixth-generation Latter-day Saint in a large and active family, Marti has both an undergraduate and a law degree from Brigham Young University and served a mission in Latin America where she learned the fluent Spanish that now stands her in good stead as she practices immigration law and represents a nonprofit organization devoted to helping Hispanic immigrants in Utah.

A close friend of David C. Knowlton's when he was fired from BYU in 1993, Marti "observ[ed] up close the destructive and abusive uses of institutional power. I was never personally a target. But as a result of what I saw and experienced--the heartbreak, injustice, authoritarianism, and general abuse of institutional and priesthood power--I made the decision not to return to active membership in the LDS Church."

But as the recipient of an earlier unequivocal experience with "the grace and love of God," she found herself spiritually thirsty--unwilling and unable to simply turn her back on organized religion. Her first experience with the Episcopal Church was an unforgettable Easter service in 1995, and gradually she became a participating, contributing member of the congregation. She began team-teaching a

Sunday School class and then was asked to stand for election to the vestry. "Much to my surprise," she said, "... I now found myself... more active, and more involved, and with more responsibility, particularly financial, than I could ever have even expected within the LDS church (at least in Utah), given the limitations of my status as single and female." She also described her rigorous, self-propelled study of Episcopalian beliefs and the "liberation into celebration" that they brought her.

Obviously, Marti is not alone. According to informed estimates, perhaps 40 percent of the Episcopal Church in Utah consists of former Mormons. Her message was one of respect for the spiritual journeys of each human being but also an invitation, especially to those who feel that Mormonism no longer offers safety and spiritual nurture, to consider other faith communities. Marti's essay will be published in full in a forthcoming volume of the Case Reports of the Mormon Alliance.

DAYS OF WONDER

Rhoda Thurston

The first most wonderful day to me was when I discovered a head on my shoulders, created especially for me to use and to choose my life's destiny.

The second most wonderful day was when I began to learn the story of God's love and his gospel of salvation and redemption for human souls.

Some members of religious bodies desire freedom to choose the way of life that gives a foundation to their faith and hope in a God whom they can love and trust with assurance that he love them, too.

There is no greater fortune to be found than a friend who inspires his or her associates with a sense of personal worth and self-esteem, with encouragement and kindness in friendly relationships as coworkers.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a pioneer for women's rights, found such a friend in a liberal minister, Theodore Parker (1810-60). She walked four miles to church and back to hear Parker invoke an androgynous "Mother and Father of us all."

Parker's father was a man of "unfailing human sympathy," his mother industrious and neat. In his home, Parker learned faith in God and the primacy of conscience. His childhood faith was directed to God as "Our Father and Our Mother." He preferred truth for authority, not authority for truth. He had a genius for making religion desirable, useful and benevolent. As a teacher, he inspired his students by winning their confidence and love.

One of his sermons on "The Public Function of Woman," preached on 27 March 1853, still sounds very timely:

"The domestic function of woman, as a housekeeper, wife, and mother, does not exhaust her powers. Woman's function, like charity, begins at home; then, like charity, goes everywhere. To make one half of the human race consume all their energies in the functions of housekeeper, wife, and mother, is a monstrous waste of the most precious material that God ever made. . . .

"To every woman let me say, 'Respect your nature as a human being, your nature as a woman; then respect your rights, then remember your duty to possess, to use, to develop and to enjoy every faculty which God has given you, each in its normal way.'

"And to men let me say, 'Respect, with the profoundest reverence the mother who bore you, the sisters who bless you, the woman that you love, the woman that you marry. As you seek to possess your own manly rights, seek also, by that great arm, by that powerful brain, seek to vindicate her rights as woman, as your own as man. Then we may see better things in the church, better things in the state, in the community, in the home. Then the green shall show what buds it hid, the buds shall blossom,

the flowers bear fruit, and the blessing of God be on us all."

Speaking against slavery, he affirmed stirringly: "I am not a man who loves violence; I respect the sacredness of human life, but this I say solemnly, that I will do all in my power to rescue any fugitive slave from the hands of any officer who attempts to return him to bondage. I will resist him as gently as I know how, but with such strength as I can command; I will ring the bells and alarm the town; I will serve as head, as foot, or as hand to any body of serious and earnest men, who will go with me, with no weapons but their hands, in this work. I will do it as readily as I would lift a man out of water, or pluck him from the teeth of a wolf or snatch him from the hands of a murderer. What is a fine of a thousand dollars, and gaoling for six months, to the liberty of a man? My money perish with me if it stand between me and the eternal law of God!" (Qtd. in Albert Reville, Theodore Parker's Life and Writings [London, 1877], 111).

We still need this kind of character to gain freedom, to believe the truth that makes us free, to believe in a Godly Mother as well as a Father God, whom prophets have revealed and whom prophets now rebuke because it doesn't agree with popular theology.

Guest Editorial

OUR NEED FOR THE GOSPEL OF GRACE AND FAITH

Harry Fox

In a previous guest editorial on our need for the unconditional dimension of reality, I closed with the statement that this is what God wants most from us: our unconditional love-commitment to him in response to his unconditional love-commitment to us. I now wish to pursue this idea further.

Far too many of us have what could be called a "conventional" idea of "religion,"

namely, that all we need is a Great Law-Giver in the sky who issues orders to us through a manual of instructions similar to the Department of Motor Vehicles code book, which we are fully capable of obeying, thereby gaining eternal life in heaven.

This conventional idea lacks two essential elements which the Apostle Paul brings to our attention, namely, grace and faith. According to this view, we are not "saved" by mechanical obedience to commandments but rather by personal faith-dependance on God's loving grace in Christ, which enables us to produce good works (Eph. 2:8-10) or, as in Galatians 5:22-23, to bear "the fruit of the Spirit" which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self-control."

This is why the author of Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Without faith in God's ability to save us by his grace, in spite of our imperfect obedience to his commandments, we are impotent to be what he wants us to be and do. This means that "eternal life" is not something we "earn," but is rather something we *accept* by faith as a free gift of God's grace (Rom. 6:23). In other words, "good works" are not done in order to get salvation from God but rather are the *result* of our accepting his grace.

In order for us to be sufficiently energized by God's love and grace, we need to become more aware of their tremendous magnitude and radical nature. Peter's sermon recorded in Acts 2 is a good source for such awareness. His entire sermon could be summarized as follows: "When we did our *worst* to God (by nailing His Son to a cross), he did his *best* for us (by forgiving our monstrous sin)!" When Peter's hearers heard this unprecedented good news (the "gospel"), they cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do in response to such information?" (my paraphrase), to which Peter replied (again my paraphrase), "Allow this glorious good news to transform your thinking

#)

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.

All of this brings us full circle to where we started: God obtains our unconditional love-commitment to him (faith) by his unconditional love-commitment to us (grace). The long-term energy which this inspires in us enables us to love him and our spouse and children as well as others, including our enemies! -- and thus demonstrate to the world that we are Christ's disciples (John 13:33-34).

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 last weeks of December, March, July, and September. Please send all correspondence about articles and subscriptions to the Mormon Alliance, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115.

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 and the *Case Reports* volume for that year. On request, you may receive meeting notices at no charge. Copies of earlier *Case Reports*, 1996 and 1997, are available from Signature Books for \$20 apiece (price includes shipping) at 564 W. 400 North, Salt Lake City, UT 84116. The order line is (801) 531-0164.

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

#)

JANUARY MEETING

President Hinckley is widely recognized as one of the most skilled and experienced of General Authorities at meeting the media. He is also unusual in actively making himself available for interviews, rather than avoiding the press, and at establishing a warm, grandfatherly tone rather than getting engaged in harsh exchanges on social issues or getting bogged down in doctrinal details. At the same time, however, he has sometimes taken a position with the media that has some exposes slippage with what he says when speaking to an audience of Saints.

After more than five years of a track record, it's time to explore President Hinckley's public relations success and "the internal message." On Wednesday, 10 January 2001, from 7:00 to 8:30 p.m., Becky Johns, a Ph.D. and member of the Communications Department faculty at Weber State University, will present a paper analyzing President Hinckley's major media statements and their subtextual messages. This meeting will be held in the second-floor meeting room of the main library (south and east of the escalators), 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City. Audience participation is welcome.

* * * *

To bear with patience wrongs done to oneself is a mark of perfection, but to bear with patience wrongs done to someone else is a mark of imperfection and even of actual sin.

-- Thomas Aquinas (1225?-1274)

CHURCHWATCH

Lavina Fielding Anderson

September 2000. "While men are the senior pastors of more than nine out of ten Protestant churches and all Catholic churches, women comprise nearly 60 percent of the church members. Women are 56 percent more likely to hold a leadership position at a church. They are 46 percent more likely to disciple others. They are 39 percent more likely to have a devotional or quiet time. And they are 29 percent more likely to attend church. Barna Research Online, "Women Are Mainstay of U.S. Spirituality," *Signs of the Times*, Sept. 2000, 4.

1 September 2000. Gavin Grooms of Provo started a website to counter protests against the Boy Scouts ban on gays. The site presents arguments in support of the BSA's position and solicits donations to replace funding lost from organizations that oppose the anti-gay position. Grooms says he has "received

national attention and support" as a result. "Utahn Starts Web Site Backing Gay Ban," *Salt Lake Tribune* 13 September 2000, N4.

19 September 2000. Ogden (Utah) High School's plan to present the musical *Godspell* generated great controversy and resulted in a request for the Church's official position. "Some protesters in the Utah town say the play is too religious. Others say it is sacrilegious." Harold Oaks, BYU associate dean of the College of Fine Arts and Communications, said *Godspell* had been presented as a high school workshop but never as a university production. He also said that while the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has taken a stand that the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* did not present Christ as a deity, the Church had not taken such a stand on *Godspell*. The musical is based on a lively hippie-style retelling of the gospel of Matthew, including puppet plays of the "Good Samaritan" parable and the vision of a "Beautiful City." "*Godspell* Has Some Parents Upset in Ogden," *Deseret News*, 19 September 2000, A1.

19 September 2000. BYU's NewsNet was named the "Best All-Around Online Student Newspaper" by the Society of Professional Journalists, reinforcing its award for "best online service" in 1999 and 2000 from *Editor and Publisher Magazine*. NewsNet includes "includes online news from the *Daily Universe*, KBYU-TV, KBYU-Radio and CCN-Cable News. BYU president Merrill J. Bateman praised the Communications Department for "lead[ing] the way in interactive journalism." According to John Gholdston, managing director of NewsNet, "almost 200 reporters, editors, photographers, videographers, designers, coders and tireless workers" are involved in producing NewsNet. "He said exploring without prejudices was one of NewsNet's greatest assets. 'The other great element is to find bright, innovative problem-solvers to put in decision-making positions and then trust their judgments.'" -- BYU News release, on Mormon News e-mail list.

21 September 2000. The *Christian Science Monitor* featured the long-term, on-going litigation against the Boston Temple in a lengthy feature on the zoning difficulties that many churches face in what seems to be a more sophisticated version of religious discrimination. Recent Congressional legislation, recognizing this bias, requires local governments and planning boards to show "compelling reasons" for zoning restrictions on religions. The Boston Temple's open-houses began, even though the building still lacks a steeple, thanks to a court decision reversing the local zoning board's decision that the steeple was permissible. The Church has appealed the decision. The neighbors who are opposed to the temple claim that the town of Belmont permitted the temple's construction under a law that they claim is unconstitutional. They are appealing it to the U.S. Supreme Court, asking that the temple be demolished. The Church earlier abandoned its plans to build a temple in Tennessee, when local zoning authorities said it did not fit into the "suburban estates" neighborhood, although it was "located next to other churches, and . . . was compatible in size to the other churches."

The *Monitor* also gave the example of "an orthodox Jewish congregation in Los Angeles" that has not been permitted to meet in a home, although the neighborhood has "schools, recreational facilities, embassies, and a law school," and is on a street that carries 84,000. An Islamic group in Frederick, Maryland, was denied access to water and sewer lines on property it had purchased even though the same land had been granted water and sewer access as a baseball complex. Zoning officials in Richmond, Virginia, restricted the number of people who could be fed in a Methodist homeless program and also tried to limit its worshipers. A 1997 study by BYU and by the law firm Mayer, Brown & Platt showed that religions representing 9 percent of the U.S. population were involved in 49 percent of

zoning litigation. Jane Lampman, "Religious Groups Find Cities Less Hospitable on Zoning Matters," Christian Science Monitor, 21 Sept.2000, N1, Mormon-News on-line version.

27 September 2000. Sunstone announced that it is accepting applications for editor of *Sunstone Magazine*. The position is full-time with a "negotiable" salary. "Under the direction of Elbert Peck, executive director of the foundation, the editor is responsible to produce a timely, vibrant, and stimulating *Sunstone Magazine*. Collaborating with a part-time associate editor, a part-time typesetter, the editorial committee of the board of trustees, and a host of volunteers, the editor defines and implements editorial philosophy and policy, commissions magazine articles, oversees the review and acceptance of submissions, edits and directs the editing process, coordinates with section editors, commissions illustrations and humorous drawings, and supervises volunteer editors, writers, proofreaders, artists, and photographers." The announcement specifically noted: "Contrary to recent rumors, Elbert Peck, Sunstone editor since 1986, is not presently considering ending his Sunstone tenure. In fact, the creation of the editor position and the recently hired Sunstone business manager are intended, among other things, to keep burnout from causing him to leave." Those interested should contact Elbert Peck at (801) 355-5926, e-mail: SunstoneEP@aol.com.

MORMON ALLIANCE
LAVINA FIELDING ANDERSON
1519 ROBERTA STREET
SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84115

TALKING TO A FALLOW DEER AT HOGLE ZOO

Rita Bowles

Your extended antlers are my outstretched
arms demanding an end. Your cloven hooves,
my dark desires leaving their impression.

Yearly we slough from our mossy skulls
the weapons of an unfinished revolution
and immediately seek to replace them

with stouter, keener, more effective arms;
forever in pursuit of the sharpest defense
because we are the minikin of our species,

still perceived as docile, mellow, soft,
and chiefly revered for our obliging veneers.
Our needs are set aside, but not forgotten.

While we'd be more at ease in a velvet forest,
we are in fact the hardy survivors
of bleak mountainsides and chain-link hedges

not easy to swallow. So we ruminate our lots,
digesting what we can, and eliminate the rest.
We are the uncultivated, the wild, the fallow:

Your tawny skin may lose its mushroom dapple
in winter, when my sorrel freckles fade, but
our dogged, feral spots are never wholly lost.