



BY COMMON CONSENT



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CONFERENCE TIME

It's general conference time again, and the faithful will be gathering, first at the Conference Center, in stake centers, and in living rooms to hear two days of addresses and sermons. Then the *really* faithful will gather for the semi-annual conference critique to mull over the messages, compare this conference to past conferences, to tease out (possibly hidden) meanings in the messages, to deduce new directions or intensifications of the old ones, and, in general, to make sense out of this oldest public ritual of Mormonism.

Janice Allred will chair this participatory event, which will convene Monday evening, October 8, 2001, in the story room on the second floor of the main library, 209 E. 500 South, Salt Lake City, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

THE FALLING OF A FINAL AXE?

Margaret Toscano, speaking to a packed house at the August Sunstone Symposium, described the "surreal" experience of being called in to a disciplinary council by Dale R. Blake, president of South Cottonwood Stake, whom she had met exactly once before and in whose stake neither she nor any member of her family had ever attended church. She was excommunicated for apostasy in time for Thanksgiving, 2000.

The experience was mystifying, she says, because it seemed so unmotivated coming eight years after the excommunication of her husband Paul in September 1993. Yet the trial

itself was carefully scripted from a literal outline of issues developed in a particular sequence. Called as a witness was Kerry Heinz, the stake president who had excommunicated Paul, and who testified that he had "warned" Margaret not to speak or write any more about Mother in Heaven. This prior warning, coupled with transcripts of unpublished talks and published presentations, constituted "evidence" that Margaret had willfully disobeyed priesthood authority in continuing to promulgate "false doctrine," one of the three definitions of apostasy.

The evening was filled with the forms of courtesy that "masked the violence," with the entire room of fifteen men rising whenever she stood and many compliments to Margaret about her "reasonableness" and "passion." But her efforts to supply a context for discussing the history of doctrinal changes were quickly interrupted with snapped orders that she was not to "lecture" the court. President Blake dismissed as "obscene" a carefully researched presentation Margaret had done on depictions of goddesses in various cultures and refused to entertain any notion that nudity was not offensive per se in all cultures.

Robert Rees and Daniel Rector responded to Margaret's paper. Daniel's response revisited his own bruising experience as publisher of *Sunstone*, when his temple recommend was confiscated in 1991 after the magazine published a summary of news accounts printed nationwide of changes to the endowment ceremony.

Margaret's experience, and Daniel's response, will be published in the forthcoming volume of the Case Reports that summarizes the 1993-95 (now extended to 2000) excommunications and firings from BYU.

Music and the Revealed Word: Musings on Hymns and Whos and Whys

John Sebastian

I'm a nonprofessional musician, but a good one, with training and experience at the Tabernacle and in various places in the United States and Europe. I got a call last summer from our ward music director asking me if I would play in church on the Sunday after the Fourth of July. I've only been in this ward a few months, but they know of my background, so the call wasn't much of a surprise.

"I've got a lovely, spiritually uplifting Rachmaninoff prelude all ready to play, or a gorgeous Brahms Intermezzo," I said. "Maybe I could play one of them."

"Oh, no, that wouldn't do at all," she responded. "I was thinking maybe you could play this beautiful version of 'O Beautiful for Spacious Skies' that I have. It was arranged by xxx." Xxx is an LDS pop musician.

I borrowed her music and tried it out. Unfortunately, this was not one of X's better arrangements, a bit more bombastic and showy than I really wanted to play in a sacrament meeting. I called her back: "Are you sure you want that number? I'm not sure that it's a very good arrangement for sacrament meeting. Maybe it would work for the ward party, but it's not too worshipful. I really think that one of the classical things I mentioned would be better. Or I could play 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring' on

the organ."

"Oh, absolutely not," she said, audibly horrified. "At the multi-stake music training a few months ago, we were told that hymns were always best for sacrament meetings."

At this point, my sarcastic mode switched into high gear: "Perhaps instead of 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring,' I could do a nice peppy arrangement of 'We Are All Enlisted,'" I snapped.

"That would be perfect!" she bubbled, missing the sarcasm entirely.

What ensued at that point was a long discussion on what music is suitable for church meetings, and especially for sacrament meeting. She fervently believes that only hymns are acceptable for sacrament meetings, an attitude that I've encountered more and more often. The most trite, banal hymn will trump even the most exalted non-hymn.

Now that our conversation is receding into the mists of the past, I've been thinking about why she was so adamant that only hymns are acceptable and how a church which once had aspirations to produce Shakespeares, Michaelangelos, and Bachs of its own has fallen to such a level. My conclusion is that it is a matter of placing ease of administration ahead of all else. We have, as a church, fallen into the oldest trap there is.

The idea that hymns are the only music suitable for sacrament meeting seems to have come from Elder Boyd K. Packer, whose views on the subject are well known. The July 2001 *Ensign* even cites an incident where he (rather rudely, I thought) interrupted an organist playing Bach as prelude for a regional meeting and insisted on hymns instead. Now, the *General Handbook of Instructions* says that hymns are encouraged music for sacrament meetings, but it does not say that no

other music is acceptable. Still, many bishops and stake presidents have ruled that, at least in their area of responsibility, only hymns will be used.

Why? Simple. For the average bishop, there are enough problems on the schedule and enough demands on his limited time that preplanned, cookie-cutter meetings are a welcome timesaver. So what if the meetings are boring? It's the true church--isn't that enough? And when the music chairman asks if Sister Jones can play in sacrament meeting, it's comforting to be able to turn to a handy rule that frees the bishop from the necessity to decide if Sister Jones's music is appropriate. It's less work to have a rule than to acquire and exercise taste and judgment. If some GA said something sometime somewhere about music (or any other topic), all we have to do is look it up and do what he says. No thought, effort, expertise, prayer, or spiritual struggle required.

So the bishop--or the stake president or the stake music director--tells the music director, "Nothing but hymns." "After all, Elder Packer likes them," mutters the bishop to himself. "How can I go wrong?"

Well, here's how. By insisting on making the music decisions, the bishop (or stake president, or whoever) is taking away from the music director the opportunity to magnify her calling. Ditto for the musicians.

But remember when Jethro told Moses that he needed to let others help him govern the children of Israel? It wasn't just Moses who was suffering. The people themselves would 'wear away' if they got too dependant on Moses! (Exod. 18:12-23)

Taking decisions--significant and important decisions--away from people limits their growth. And after all, that is one of the great purposes of our life on earth. It has been suggested that the War in Heav-

en is still going on. We are still, each of us, often confronted with the seductively easy path of unthinking agreement with authority. In a way, of course, obedience is difficult. However, it is deceptively comfortable to surrender one's will to other men, especially to obviously good men.

The problem is this: As we should have learned in the War in Heaven, there is only One to whom we can safely surrender our personal will. No wonder Brigham Young warned the Church about the dangers of following the Church leaders--including himself--just because they are Church leaders.

To put it simply--We cannot grow by blind obedience, *even by blind obedience to correct counsel*, and growth is what is required if we are ever to be fit for the Celestial Kingdom. The easy, reflexive, unthinking way was not the path that the Savior proposed. Following any path but his will not develop in us the strength we will need to be with him someday.

We've gone from hymns to the War in Heaven. Is it really all that important? Yes and no. We are commanded to attend sacrament meeting to renew our covenant with the Savior by partaking of the sacrament. Everything about the meeting should point us toward that experience, help us understand its significance, and lift us toward him. In a way, it doesn't really matter what music is performed or sung, as long as it points us toward the Savior. On the other hand, when Joseph Smith paraphrased Paul in stating that the Saints seek after every good and praiseworthy thing, he was reminding us that one of the goals of the gospel is to make us better--more like the Savior himself. We can and should progress from the milk of the gospel to more solid fare. Perhaps instead of seeking to suit the lowest common denominator in

musical taste in the congregation, music directors should aspire to present the best music that can be performed. Like the admonition to read the best books, no fixed list should be furnished. The hymnbook is a guide and furnishes a variety of excellent music—but it's not all there is.

In the end, it may not matter to anyone else in the ward whether I play "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" or "We Are All Enlisted." But I am embarrassed to give less than my best, less than the ward members deserve, less than the Lord requires of me. It is very frustrating that someone else has decided for me that I will not be allowed to give what I can give. My growth in the gospel has been limited, yet still I feel the need to grow.

Enough said: I'm going to go practice!

A Story and Three Wishes: Musings on Worthiness and the Sacrament

Frances Lee Menlove

The Story

St. Paul's Episcopal Church is the setting. Christmas Eve midnight mass is the time. Much to the surprise of Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong, who was officiating that evening, a rabbi and his wife came forward with hands outstretched to receive the bread and wine of the communion service. They were given the sacrament since it was the bishop's practice to refuse no one who came forward to the altar.

Bishop Spong and the rabbi had a warm relationship. Their congregations had worshipped together. Nevertheless, the bishop was a little surprised. Bishop Spong describes their chance meeting

about a week later.

Bishop: "Joe, we were so pleased to have you and your wife at church on Christmas Eve. Thank you for coming."

Rabbi: "I'll bet you were a little surprised when we decided to receive communion."

Bishop: "I was. Tell me what that meant to you."

Rabbi: "We thought about it a lot before we did it, Jack, but let me ask you some questions to show you how we came to that decision. Was not the communion service of the Christian Church said to have originated in the Last Supper, which was supposed to be a Jewish Passover?"

Bishop: "Yes, that is a major strand in our tradition."

Rabbi: "Were not all those fellows who attended the Last Supper Jews?"

Bishop: "Yes, they were."

Rabbi: "Were any of those disciples at the meal baptized or confirmed?"

Bishop: "Not to my knowledge."

Rabbi: "Well, we figured that if unbaptized Jews could receive communion from Jesus at the start of the Christian faith, then we could receive it from you in thanksgiving for the dialogue that had brought us close together again!"¹

Three Wishes

I wish we would remember Jesus is our host at the sacrament service—that we would imagine it is Jesus who is offering each one of us the bread and water. The deacons, the priests, the bishopric would be important facilitators; however, the invitation to eat the bread and drink the water would be coming from Him.

I wish that withholding of the sacrament would never be used as a disciplinary tool. Excommunicated or disfellowshipped members would be free to take the bread

and water as the Spirit prompted them, the sacred space between each of us and Jesus, our host, would be free and open. No Church authority would feel either the desire or the authority to step into that space. No member would allow an encroachment.

I wish that the invitation to participate in this central act of Christian worship was one of openness and love to all. I wish the bishop would stand and say to the congregation before the sacrament is passed: "This sacrament is open to all who have known God's saving love or would like to know that love."

Note

1. John Shelby Spong, *Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love, and Equality* (San Francisco: Harper, 2000), 242.

Guest Editorial

THE BORDERLINE

Robert J. Morris

Last year, *By Common Consent* noted some of the "boundary issues" raised in the October 2000 general conference. Among these was the "unchallenged low point" of Elder Boyd K. Packer's (continuing) condemnation of gays and lesbians.

Always there has been a boundary, but it has not always been the same boundary. The problem with boundaries is that they slip and slide at whim and become weapons of politics, religion, and expediency. As skirmishes develop first here, then there, one border dissolves, another must be shored up—or invented—all to define who we are *not*. Boundaries create the Other, the stranger, the different—the "not us," the THEM. Thus, in Luke 18:11, the Pharisee stood and prayed thus *with himself*, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men. . . ." (emphasis mine).

Recall all the "evil empires" of the past that have come and gone. Spencer W. Kimball announced the end of priesthood discrimina-

tion against black men in 1978, then at almost the same moment initiated a new border: homosexuals. Women and feminists soon followed in the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment.¹ This was about the same era when materials were added to the Doctrine and Covenants making "the brethren" infallible.²

Packer said: "We did not make the rules; they were revealed as commandments. We do not cause nor can we prevent the consequences if you disobey the moral laws."³ That statement cannot be considered accurate when the speaker holds the power to realign the boundary and to do so making a simultaneous claim of infallibility.

In his book, *The Territorial Imperative*, Robert Ardrey tells of the tribes of Callicebus monkeys. They meet at their borders in the rain forest and screech threats to each other. They are the mirror image of each other, bone of the same bone. They are not real enemies; they don't really threaten each other; they rarely come to blows. They merely clarify each other's boundaries. What the monkeys apparently ignore is the fact that the tribes arguing back and forth across the border *are the same species*.

A memorable episode of the original Star Trek in 1969 featured Frank Gorshin as Commander Bele, whose body and face are white on the left and black on the right. His antagonist, Lokai, is just the opposite, a fact that apparently escapes the notice of everyone aboard the *Enterprise*. Gorshin pleads in desperation: "Don't you see the obvious horrific difference?" In a marvelous moment of silent bewilderment, Captain Kirk and Spock turn to each other as if to say, "Of all the strange stuff we have seen in the galaxy, this is absolutely the dumbest." This situation is what lawyers mean by "a distinction without a difference."⁴

The ugly spectacle of the last decade has been Christendom, including Mormondom, increasingly defining themselves by *whom they hate*. The devastating attack of apparently Islamic terrorists on the World Trade Center

with its shattering loss of civilian life has simply made the same point in unmistakable terms. But one of the earliest *Family Home Evening Manuals* in the mid-1960s contained this verse:

He drew a circle that shut me out
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
But love and I had the wit to win
We drew a circle that took him in.

In claiming that the three greatest threats to the church are homosexuals, feminists, and scholars ("so-called intellectuals"), Packer has said that such individuals "have made major invasions into the membership of the Church." The word "invasions" exquisitely bespeaks the Callicebus image of the false external threat to the border.

The Book of Mormon chillingly describes the nearly complete destruction of Nephite society just prior to the appearance of Jesus Christ when the people divided into tribes based on their kindreds (3 Ne. 7:1-14). In the Zion society that followed Christ's visit, there were no such delimitations, "nor any manner of -ites" (4 Ne. 1:17).

Surely it is this last image that the scriptures mean in the commandment/promise/prophecy that "Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged. . . . (D&C 82:14; emphasis mine).

Notes

1. For resources on the history of homosexuality and feminism

among Mormons, including official efforts at suppression, see D. Michael Quinn, *Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Connell ("Rocky") O'Donovan, "The Abominable and Detestable Crime Against Nature": A Brief History of Homosexuality and Mormonism, 1840-1980," <<http://www.affirmation.org/abomination.htm>>; and Maxine Hanks, ed. *Women and Authority: Re-Emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992). My article, "What Though Our Rights Have Been Assailed?" Mormons, Politics, Same-Sex Marriage, and Cultural Abuse in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii), *Women's Rights Law Reporter* 18, no. 2 (1997): 129-203, documents the Church's involvement in Hawaiian legislation and the courts to head off a movement toward legalizing gay marriage.

2. See Doctrine and Covenants, "Excerpts from Three Addresses by President Wilford Woodruff Regarding the Manifesto," following Official Declaration 1.

3. For the address to the All-Church Coordinating Council in which Packer made this statement and also issued his denunciation of gays, feminists, and scholars, see: <<http://www.affirmation.org/packer.htm>> and <<http://www.ultim.org/newsletters/no85.htm>>; also reported in *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 September 1993.

4. "Star Trek" (1969) Frank Gorshin playing "Commissioner Bele" in episode: "Let That Be Your Last Battlefield" (episode #70) first aired January 10, 1969. Lokai played by Lou Antonio. <http://www.wallsoffame.com/html/television_88.html>.

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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. Please send all correspondence about articles, subscriptions (\$30 per year; includes annual Case Reports), and reports of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse to Mormon Alliance, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115, or Lavina Fielding Anderson, <lavina@elavina.org>.

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