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YEA, YEA  NAY, NAY

SYMPOSIUM DATES

WHY IS this year's symposium in July (July 29-August 1)? I thought it was always opposite BYU Education Week.

MUSS AND RUSS FOX
Washington, D.C.

Editor's response:

The symposiums are indeed moving up the calendar, and next year's, which celebrates the Sunstone Foundation's twenty-fifth anniversary, is yet earlier: July 14-17 at the Salt Palace. But never was one of the twenty Salt Lake Sunstone symposiums intentionally put opposite BYU Education Week.

Here is the symposium scheduling history. The founders put the first symposium in the summer of 1979 because they didn't have funds to fly out speakers and summer is when many pilgrimage to Utah. That precedent set the season, and people have planned vacations around symposiums ever since.

In those early years, the symposium was regularly scheduled (with exceptions for hotel availability) for the last August weekend before Labor Day weekend in hopes that thoughtful BYU students would return early to Utah for it. Fat chance. But the late summer date did mean that vacationing BYU professors would be back in town and available.

More recently, symposiums have been scheduled for mid-August and then early August because some academic calendars began starting in late and mid-August.

So, now, expect the symposium to be held from mid-July to early August.

RETURNS REQUESTED

EDITOR Elbert Peck's request for letters to authors goes both ways ("Brassful Thinking," SUNSTONE Mar. 1998). I sent a letter to one Sunstone author over a year ago and asked for a response. If authors are not overwhelmed with feedback, as Peck suggests, I am curious why I heard nothing. That experience would discourage most people from continuing to write. Do authors want to write for the masses, receive feedback from individuals, and then feel that it is not important to respond? By contrast, my wife sent two letters to Apostle Neal A. Maxwell with questions about his books. Both received a warm and personal response.

As much as SUNSTONE adds to the Mormon experience, there is room for growth.

LARRY WATTS
Orange County, Calif.

GRASSROOTS HOLIDAY

ELBERT PECK is right that we need to make Pioneer Day a worldwide Mormon holiday/service project. Members shouldn't wait for headquarters to send a letter making it happen; then, it's just another program. It'd be better if it comes from the grassroots, if local wards and stakes just start doing it. If the idea catches on, then, eventually, someday, Salt Lake simply will canonize what is already a fact. Just as with Primary, MIA, Sunday School, Church welfare, and most good, pragmatic Mormon endeavors.

ERIC STONE
Toluca Lake, Calif.

SUNSTONE TAP DANCE

I AM converted to what SUNSTONE does. I have been searching for a place where I can be what I am without limitations from the traditional mediums of thought and worship. Don't get me wrong: I'm not dealing with sexual identity confusion or apostasy. I'm simply an open-minded, humanistic Mormon who at times feels as if he is alone.

I, too, was deeply influenced by Bishop Stan Roberts, and I appreciate Karen Southwick's "Single in San Francisco" (SUNSTONE, Mar. 1998). In 1985, I called Bishop Roberts: "My name is Scott. I have just gotten out of the Army and am working on Alcatraz Island as a park ranger. I am not religious or active, but I need a place to stay." He said, "Call me back in an hour." I did, and he had a place for me—a true shepherd. The singles' ward made me to want to become a true believer.

Then I went to BYU, got married forever in the temple. It lasted one-and-a-half years. I went from being a married man to being divorced. In Utah, this was like saying you are an ex-con, especially since I was not a returned missionary and was left-of-center politically. I moved back to California.

Now, eight years later, I tap dance from activity to inactivity. In SUNSTONE, I feel I have found a place where a person like me can be embraced and be spiritual.

SCOTT A. WEAKLEY
Los Angeles

THE GOOD WARD

KAREN SOUTHWICK describes a singles' ward that is a vibrant community, not a graduate MIA (as Dallin Oaks once said BYU isn't) providing spouse-finding activities.

That is undoubtedly a by-product, but for singles' wards to be effective, their core needs to be Christians gathering together to carry the cross—to bear each others' burdens, to rejoice and weep together, to forgive and be forgiven, to love and serve and to be loved and be served. When that is the purpose, then silly things like sexual identity and age limits (from the fear that old men [35+] will prey on young women) take second place, and then the ward will have the spiritual vitality Southwick describes. Otherwise, we've just made the Church into a social club, and we've told singles their life has no real meaning unless they're married.

JAKE ANDREWS
La Jolla, Calif

"ANY SICK AMONG YOU?"

THE PRACTICE of anointing and blessing with consecrated oil is one of the most comforting doctrines in Christianity in general and in the Restoration in particular. Since 1944, I have participated in many ad-

ministrations in the military, on my mission, and in several countries. The experience was always rewarding, almost always beneficial, leaving me with comfort and peace. Recently, I have participated in two unusual, perhaps unique, administration experiences.

THE FIRST BLESSING: Two years ago Violet, my wife, suffered from a traumatic sinus infection that seemed to compound other medical problems and create new ones. It plagued her for months. She couldn't sleep, watch TV, read, do much housework, or spend much time at the computer. She asked for an administration from me and our home teacher and received comfort. After two months, however, she called an RLDS friend, Judy Lloyd, and requested a blessing from her. Judy was the presiding elder for the local RLDS congregation. I was delighted by Violet's request. An appointment was made, and Violet asked me if I would participate; I said, "Of course. I would be honored."

Violet requested I anoint and Judy seal. I felt the joint administration entirely in order, and we enjoyed unusual spiritual harmony.

During the blessing, I was moved by the words that Judy said and felt them appropriate and fitting. We were, after all, spiritual and religious cousins united in faith in the power of administrations and the priesthood. I sensed the power of this combined event, but I think Judy and Violet captured it better in their journals. From Judy's journal:

This was a first for me. I was intrigued to participate as Restorationists in an ordinance established when we were one, and which would bring us together again in concern for Violet. The spirit was rich and affirming. I prayed in recognition that as a daughter, Violet had come in faith and obedience to holy priesthood, asking a special blessing. . . . In the peace of those moments, with the lake beside us, and the earth's beauty visible on all sides of the enclosed sun porch, Stan and I laid our hands on her head. Elder Stan anointed and Elder Judy confirmed the anointing. In my blessing I acknowledged Violet's strong



"I move the curse of Cain to the little trash can and that's that."



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emergence into full awareness of her talents and abilities. Health problems have impaired her usual intense use of historical interests for the good of others. It is clearly not in the Lord's plan that Violet's voice in this important work be silenced. May the illness be rebuked—that which limits her and her companion as they work towards their goals. . . . I feel strongly Violet's gifts are for a purpose. She has brought such strength to me in the past two years. I feel the leadings of the Spirit in her life and I am pleased she entrusted me with her concerns.

From Violet's journal:

Judy has a deep testimony of Christ and her right to give blessings. She is spiritual, assured, and I love her dearly. The blessing was intensely intimate and fitting. I wish I had made a recording and taken a photograph of the historic event. It was so beautiful. Stan and I heard words and phrases we had never heard before in such circumstances. She brought her own consecrated oil and invoked the Holy Spirit by the authority of her priesthood. She was not concerned with choosing particular or "correct" words or some formula, but of conveying a healing presence for me. . . . Her hands were trembling on my head and we all felt a deep presence of the spirit. It was heart to heart blessing of woman to woman. It was so comforting, I was crying long before she had finished. Now I know for myself what the early sisters felt when they "blessed and were blessed." I think the Lord sent Judy to me. He knew my heart and my needs. I thank Him. I also felt a special connection to my Mother in Heaven during the prayer because Judy began with "Heavenly Parents, Thy daughter has asked for a blessing."

This blessing gave Violet the courage to undergo long-neglected surgery for a severe, congenital, deviated septum. Within a few weeks, she was fine and has had little trouble with sinus problems since then.

THE SECOND BLESSING: Our oldest granddaughter suffers from ADDS (Attention Deficit Disorder Syndrome) and hyperactivity, which has been treated for twelve years with medications. Recently, she made a heroic effort to get off all medicine. During a visit to us, she worked on an ambitious video for an English class. She seemed restless and had trouble concentrating, but she was adamant about not taking her medication. Violet sensed we

should give her a blessing to help her cope with life in general and specifically life without medication. Violet said: "I think she needs a grandmother's blessing. I would like you to join me." I willingly agreed.

Violet gave our granddaughter a beautiful blessing, and I sealed it. Once again, we all enjoyed a particular beautiful, spiritual, event. In the early Church, sisters such as Vilate Kimball, Patty Sessions, Louisa Barnes Pratt, Eliza R. Snow, Presendia Huntington Kimball, Zina Jacobs Young performed blessings and enjoyed occasions of profound spiritual feasts when "the love of God flowed." What could be more appropriate than grandparents' jointly blessing a granddaughter? In Violet's journal, she recorded the following:

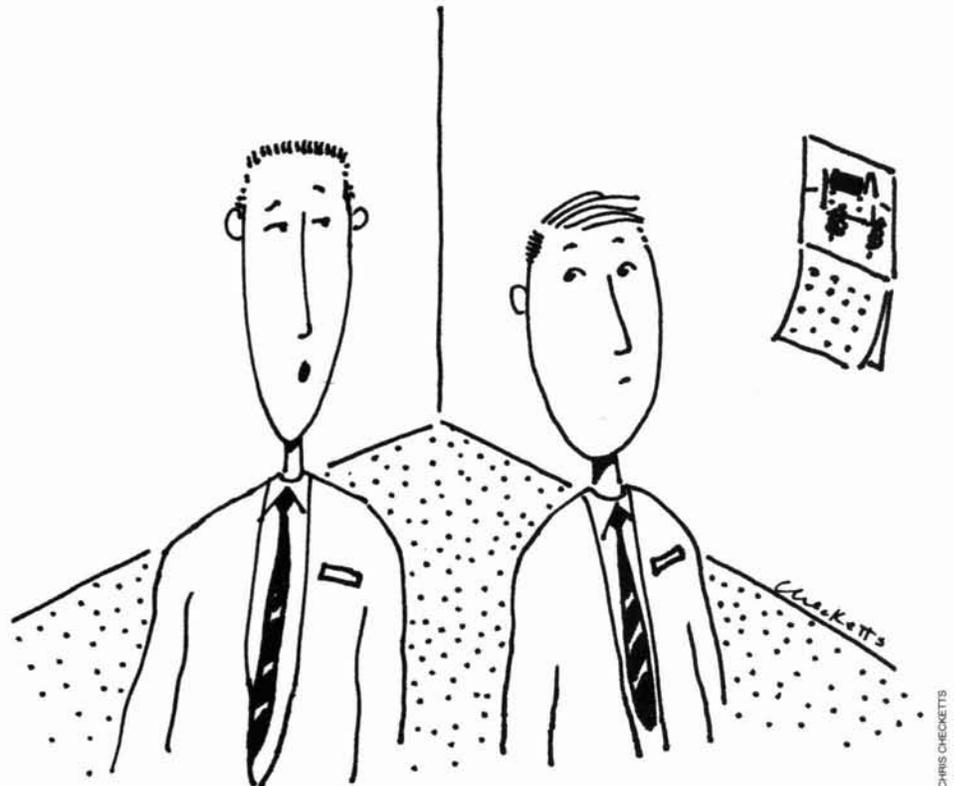
I told our granddaughter I wanted to give her a grandmother's blessing. I remembered Patty, Eliza, Louisa and Vilate blessing children and women at Nauvoo and Winter Quarters. I wanted to bond with them and find the right words and correct spirit to perform an ordinance which they did often and probably took for granted. I felt sure the Lord heard, accepted, and would help a young woman as she struggles with this major challenge in her turbulent teenage years. I poured

out upon her head all the words that a grandmother usually employs to express concern, love, hope, feelings, and aspirations for blood of her blood.

It has been several weeks now since the blessing and she is still able at present to leave her prescriptions on the sink. I recently called and asked her how her video presentation went. "I got an A, Grandma! It was the only one I got this semester." The road ahead for her will be difficult. I have seen in the past how disruptive she can be without her medication, but this time she seems mature enough to handle it better. Her parents have noticed it also. She now has a weekend job and is being recognized for her hard work ethic. Perhaps the blessing did not produce all of those changes in her life since then, but I know for a fact that it helped.

My participation in these two administrations has enlightened and given me a new understanding of spiritual matters, and I rejoice that under President Gordon B. Hinckley we as a people are becoming increasingly ecumenical.

STANLEY B. KIMBALL
Edwardsville, Illinois



"Is everything all right Elder Waterman?
You never call me 'dude' anymore."

HETEROSEXIST BIASES

IN HIS critique of Michael Quinn's *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, Armand Mauss agrees that the same-sex marriage issue is the next "crusade" of the LDS hierarchy, but he dislikes Quinn's terms "homophobic" and "anti-gay" to characterize their motives. Mauss identifies such language with the "gay rights lobby, whose agenda does not necessarily reflect the views of all homosexual persons or exhaust the range of civilized and humane ways of addressing the homosexual condition" ("Many Are Called, But Few Are Chosen," SUNSTONE, Nov. 1997).

Here's a better label for the attitude of the hierarchy: "heterosexist." Homophobia denotes an irrational fear or loathing of homosexuality and intrudes into psychology. But some may be rational, fearless, and fully self-aware in efforts to deprive homosexuals of privileges heterosexuals enjoy. Heterosexism is the belief that straight people must always come first socially, politically, and theologically. Whatever "civilized and humane" ways a heterosexist institution may use to "address the homosexual condition," it will do so from a position of presumed superiority.

Most straight Mormons I know are compassionate people who believe the restored gospel does not allow their leaders to be more "generous" toward homosexuality. Most

gay Saints I know—and being an "out" gay Mormon, I know many—are reluctant to believe that general authorities are motivated by fear or hatred, but I have never met one who does not feel that the Brethren's attitude toward homosexuality is tainted by prejudice arising from their being heterosexual.

That prejudice is, at its most benign, a natural, self-loving, and *unexamined* enthusiasm for the gift of sexuality the majority of shares. When heterosexuals say their sexuality is a beautiful and sacred gift, I believe them, even if they do not believe me when I claim the same. But given our theology of continuous revelation where no question can be said to be absolutely settled (we assert that Jesus did not mean it when he said there is no marriage, straight or gay, in the afterlife), I cannot accept that God has nothing more to say about homosexuality that would make a difference. That is heterosexist thinking.

DAVID CALLAHAN
Los Angeles, Calif

ABERRANT BEHAVIORS

GARY WATTS reports being "mugged" by his son's homosexuality ("Mugged By Reality," SUNSTONE, Dec. 1997). In an effort to understand his son's condition, Watts and his wife come to believe that their son's homosexuality is just a variation of "normal."

However, their efforts to legitimize their son's aberrant lifestyle are not in his best long-term interest. It is one thing to show compassion for those who have not learned to control surging appetites, including overeating, alcohol and drug abuse, and aberrant sexual behavior (adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia, nymphomania, polygamy, etc.), but it is a different matter, and an error, to advocate that society accept aberrant behaviors.

The "body is a temple" metaphor is apt. Whatever our bodily weaknesses (notwithstanding the varying genetic proclivities we all live with), we should feel impelled to overcome them—to strive toward being better physically. The Word of Wisdom urges us to balance our diet and to avoid harmful substances. That the optimal expression of sexuality is within a heterosexual, family-forming relationship is rarely disputed today. Striving to achieve the optimal state of being requires self-control, discipline, and sacrifice. For some, that effort may be harder than for others, but we all have some cross to bear. Overcoming temptations to indulge our appetites differentiates us from other animals.

Watts seems to think that homosexuality is binary. That is, one is or is not born with the condition. While many allow that genetic proclivities influence human behavior—and not just sexuality—the claim that one's sexual orientation is genetically predetermined,

is far from scientifically proven. If homosexuality is not wholly based in a genetic luck of the draw, then its societal legitimization as an acceptable, alternate life style is potentially destructive to family formation and is a threat to cultural cohesion. Given such circumstances, society—indeed, the Church—has an interest to insure that impressionable youngsters are protected from a proselyting homosexual culture. Unless and until it is proven with scientific consensus that homosexuality is genetically based, its practice must be considered aberrant.

Obviously, contempt for shameful acts should be offset by outpouring of compassion, love, and acceptance—"he that is without sin . . . first cast a stone" (John 8:7).

STEPHEN D. TAYLOR
Coral Gables, Flor.

OVERHEARD AT CHURCH

"I really like it each time 'jeopardy' has a Mormon question on it."

"The only purpose of the spirit of the law is to confirm the letter of the law."



Coral Gables, Flor.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

BYU'S RESPONSE to the report of the American Association of University Professors, which criticized BYU for academic freedom violations in the firing of English professor Gail Houston, states that Houston was fired for advocating praying to the Mother in Heaven. BYU administrators claim that in doing so she contradicted a fundamental doctrine of the LDS church. Have BYU administrators forgotten Eliza R. Snow's well-known Mormon hymn, "O My Father"? This hymn is actually a prayer to the Father and Mother in Heaven:

Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?

It also contains the lines:

In the heavens are parents single?
No; the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I've a Mother there.

Something is odd about a church that encourages its members to think of God as their literal, anthropomorphic father and to regard their relationship to him as a father-child relationship, yet discourages them from thinking and talking about a literal mother in heaven and punishes those who publicly do, even though it acknowledges her existence.

BYU's response cites two public statements by Houston as "endorsements" of praying to Mother in Heaven. But Houston did not advocate praying to Mother in Heaven. In the first, a *Student Review* article, she never mentions Mother in Heaven or advises anyone to pray to her. She talks about "communication with my heavenly parents." Her point is not to advocate a particular kind of prayer but to share her own experience of finding that her heavenly parents accept her with all her doubts and problems. The second, a 1994 Sunstone Symposium speech, describes her practice of meditation and tells how she visualizes Heavenly Father and Heavenly Mother. She uses "meditation" and "visualize" to describe her experiences. Although she does say in one place that this meditation is prayer for her, it is clearly not prayer as the Church defines it, and she never suggests that others adopt her practice. Her concept of Mother in Heaven in this speech reflects the orthodox Mormon understanding. She sees Heavenly Father and Mother together and herself as their child being embraced by them and encouraged to become like them.

Clearly, it is not Houston's concept of

Mother in Heaven that offends BYU and the Brethren. They had to fabricate the charge that she advocated praying to the Mother in Heaven in order to present some kind of argument that she had contradicted "fundamental Church doctrine," which contradiction BYU's Academic Freedom Statement does not allow. Calling the prohibition against praying to Mother in Heaven a fundamental Church doctrine shows an appalling lack of knowledge of the gospel and the scriptures and reveals the political motivation behind Houston's firing. A fundamental Church doctrine not given until 1991 by First Counselor Gordon B. Hinckley? A fundamental Church doctrine that has only one reference? A fundamental Church doctrine given without revelation and as a personal opinion, as President Hinckley stated. A fundamental Church doctrine that members have had no opportunity to accept or reject? Clearly, something is going on here besides a serious attempt to understand and protect fundamental Church doctrine. Houston's offense was not contradicting fundamental Church doctrine but failing to give unconditional loyalty to the institutional Church.

Christ states clearly in the Book of Mormon (3 Ne. 11) and the Doctrine and Covenants (section 10) the doctrine of his church: faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and he declares that anyone who adds to or takes away from this doctrine is not of him.

BYU's response says that Mother in Heaven is "a God other than the God to whom we are commanded to pray." This is equivalent to saying that she is not God or she is a false God. To recognize an entity as God is the most fundamental form of worship and prayer. The Church's "Proclamation on the Family" says we worship God because he is our Father, but it does not even mention Mother in Heaven explicitly. This same document and other Church rhetoric assure us that men and women are *equal* partners, but apparently somewhere along the path to godhood, Father in Heaven became superior to Mother in Heaven. He is God (a being we worship and pray to), but she is not.

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HERE AND NOW

WHEN, IN READING the issue of March-April 1998 of *SUNSTONE*, I reflect on the profound understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament that animated Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, I find puzzling the neglect of the

Bible in contemporary Mormon writing, at least as sampled by Sunstone. As a student of religion I look in vain, among the religious reflections published in these columns, for distinctively Mormon responses to the common heritage of Scripture shared by Judaism and Christianity: where does Job figure, for instance, in that issue's published reflections on suffering? or Leviticus in the issue's discussions of purity and sexuality? or (to take a Christian instance) Revelation in writing on the meaning of the age? Instead, writing focuses upon the experience of the acutely present tense, the revelation of the hour rather than of the ages. So LDS writing in *SUNSTONE* is so zealously contemporary in its character, so centered on the individual and private experience in its interest, that you deprive your faith of its foundations in history and Scripture.

The critics of LDS faith reject its claim to recover lost Scripture and portray it as an invention of the nineteenth century. The generality of LDS writing in Sunstone goes one better: pretending that everything gets going this very morning—whenever that may be. Personal inspiration, private response to prayer—these responses to God in the here and now ought not to exclude what Judaism and Christianity hold to be God's historical revelation that, the LDS faith seems to me to want to say, Mormon religion recovers and renews.

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