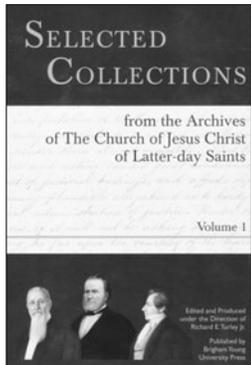


UPDATE

CHURCH ARCHIVES RELEASE
DOCUMENTS ON DVD

IN ASSOCIATION WITH *BYU Studies* and *BYU Press*, the Church's Family and Church History department has just released more than 400,000 documents from LDS archives. Priced at \$1,299, this massive collection comprises two volumes for a total of 74 DVDs. (DVDs can hold more than 4 gigabytes of information—8 times the amount of a traditional CD-ROM.) 54 DVDs, the bulk of the material, comprise the "Church Historian's Office, History of the Church, 1839–circa 1882," the Church Historian's Office Journal, 1844–1879, and the *Journal History of the Church*. The remaining discs contain diaries, letters, and other documents from various Church leaders and prominent early Latter-day Saints. A Joseph Smith collection, for example, totals more than 4,000 pages. Also included are the Brigham Young letterpress books, diaries and correspondence of Joseph F. Smith, journals and letters of Lorenzo Snow, papers of George A. Smith, and diaries of J. Golden Kimball.

The collection contains high-resolution scans, not type-scripts or text. So researchers will still need to search page by page, as they would at an archive. But pages can be enlarged. They can also be saved as separate files and opened in computer-imaging programs where brightness and contrast can be adjusted.

As with many historical archives, material deemed confidential or inappropriate for public use is blacked out. Such instances are rare, however, and the collection claims there are no silent omissions—readers will always see a black cover over the censored portion to show where material has been omitted. Preservationists can also rest assured the original documents have not been altered. While most have hailed the release of this collection as unprecedented and phenomenal, some have expressed concern. One issue raised is that of copyright. Some believe the Church rushed to release this set by the end of 2002 in order to secure future publishing rights to documents that, because of a change in publishing law, were about to lose copyright protection.

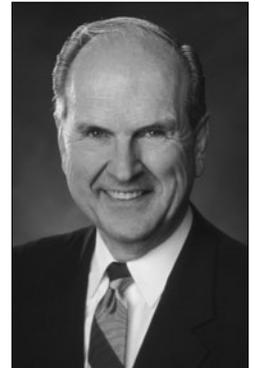
Others object to the price, complaining the Church is trying to keep the collection out of the hands of most people. They also

fear the set will quickly disappear from the market, never to be seen again.

However, even the most hardened skeptics welcome the release and the ability it gives to do in-depth research at home.

ELDER NELSON: GOD'S LOVE
NOT UNCONDITIONAL

AN ENSIGN ARTICLE by Elder Russell M. Nelson, rebutting the notion that God's love is unconditional, has sparked animated discussion on LDS email lists. "God's love cannot correctly be characterized as unconditional," says Elder Nelson in the February 2002 magazine. "Understanding that divine love and blessings are not truly unconditional can defend us against common fallacies such as these: 'Since God's love is unconditional, He will love me regardless. . . .' These arguments are used by anti-Christ's to woo people with deception."



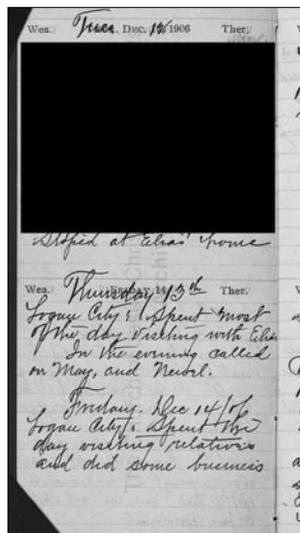
Elder Russell M. Nelson

This article puts the seal of approval on a doctrinal position quietly debated for some time now. *SUNSTONE* has learned that the question of whether God's love is unconditional was discussed by the Church's correlation committee some five years ago and submitted to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve for direction. The highest governing bodies in the Church replied that God's love is not unconditional, and the expression "God's unconditional love" has since been eliminated from all official publications.

BYU religion professor Joseph Fielding McConkie has opposed the term "unconditional love" since the 1980s. "The phrase itself is entirely unscriptural," stated McConkie in June 1987. "When I have asked people who teach this so-called doctrine how they distinguish God's 'unconditional love' from salvation by grace as taught in the Protestant world, they have been unable to do so" (*A Scriptural Search for the Ten Tribes and Other Things We Lost* [Brigham Young University, 1987], 7).

Best-selling LDS author Stephen E. Robinson also has questioned the expression, but only in one meaning. "God's love (understood as his desire for us) is unconditional," wrote Robinson in 1995. "God's love (understood as his relationship with us) is conditioned upon our positive response to his wooing of us" (*Following Christ* [Deseret Book, 1995], 150).

Mormon feminist Janice Allred, whose book *God the Mother* [Signature Books, 1997] describes God's love as unconditional, finds Elder Nelson's article troubling. "Not only does Elder Nelson fail to communicate the message of God's love, but he also displays a lack of scholarship in his article," says Allred. "It seems less like he is attempting to understand what the scriptures say about God's love than he is trying to promote an agenda of authoritarianism and conditional love: You are loved and blessed only if you obey the rules unquestioningly."



A blacked out entry from J. Golden Kimball's diary

STATEMENTS FROM AN ERA NOW GONE?

At this Christmas season we reach out to all in a spirit of love and reconciliation, even to those who speak evil against us . . . In moments of quiet, we reflect upon [Christ's] matchless life and His unconditional love for each of us.

GORDON B. HINCKLEY
LDS Church News,
11 Dec. 1993, p. 4

Godliness characterizes each of you who truly loves the Lord. You are constantly mindful of the Savior's atonement and rejoice in His unconditional love.

RUSSELL M. NELSON
Ensign, Nov. 1991
p. 61

[Christ's] duties have long been galactic, yet He noticed the widow casting in her mite. I am stunned at His perfect, unconditional love of all.

NEAL A. MAXWELL
Even As I Am
Deseret Book, 1982,
p. 115

Faith [in the Lord's will] turns us toward the Savior, his life, and his unconditional love for us.

JOSEPH B. WIRTHLIN
Finding Peace in Our Lives
Deseret Book, 1995,
p. 177

Charity develops in us as we see ourselves moving in our lives from a 'what's in it for me' kind of love to the love of family and friends and, blessedly, beyond that to an awareness of our Lord's unconditional love for us that tells us of our divine kinship with one another and with him.

AILEEN H. CLYDE
Ensign, Nov. 1994
p. 94

~~“unconditional love”~~

INTERNATIONAL LEADERS WON'T ATTEND GENERAL CONFERENCE

FOR THE FIRST time since they were organized as such, Area Presidencies and Area Authority Seventies living outside the U.S. won't be attending the April General Conference. In a veiled reference to the seemingly inevitable U.S.-led war with Iraq, Church spokesman Dale Bills said the decision "will avoid problems caused by potential uncertainties." In lieu of their gathering in Salt Lake City, traditional conference week training sessions for the area leaders will be facilitated via satellite and DVD technology.

SATELLITE BROADCAST CELEBRATES PRIMARY ANNIVERSARY

IN ANOTHER CHURCH first, tens of thousands of children gathered in stake centers in the U.S. and other countries to hear President Gordon B. Hinckley speak in an event especially tailored just for them. Broadcast 8 February 2003 from the Church's Conference Center, the meeting celebrated the 125th anniversary of the Primary.

"You have an earthly father," said President Hinckley, "but you [also] have your Father in heaven. It is just as important to love and obey your Father in heaven as it is to love and obey your earthly father."

Organized 25 August 1878, in Farmington, Utah, the Primary helps teach nearly a million LDS children worldwide.

CHURCH ENDORSES NEW PLAN FOR PLAZA ON TEMPLE SQUARE

CITY OFFICIALS AND LDS leaders are making cautious moves toward an acceptable solution to the controversy involving control over the Church's Main Street Plaza.

In an 18 February 2003 press release, Presiding Bishop H.

David Burton expresses optimism about a recent proposal by mayor Rocky Anderson: "While some details are still to be worked out," reads the statement, "the Church will support the key elements of the proposal when it is formally submitted for public discussion. . . . The Church urges the fullest possible public discussion of the proposal and remains optimistic concerning its outcome."

As reported in the December 2002 SUNSTONE, under the plan, the city would give the Church the easement over the two acres of disputed land the plaza sits on and allow the Church to invoke behavior and speech restrictions. In exchange, the Church would donate a two-acre lot on Salt Lake City's west side and help raise funds for a youth facility to be built on the lot. As it stands today, the Planning Commission will consider the proposal 9 April, and a vote by the City Council could come in late April or May.

The proposal is co-sponsored by the Alliance for Unity, which includes a number of business, religious, and community leaders. Despite the consensus, some observers predict further legal trouble for the city, as the decision could violate the separation between church and state. According to City Attorney Ed Rutan, the American Civil Liberties Union could still sue the city on the grounds that the plaza is built on a traditionally free speech space.

MARTIN'S COVE: CHURCH SAYS NO LEASE

FIVE YEARS AFTER the Church first attempted to buy a Mormon historical site in central Wyoming, negotiations between Church leaders and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) over Martin's Cove continue to stall. LDS leaders recently raised objections to a lease draft offered by the federal government. Without dismissing completely the possibility of a lease, the Church reiterated its intent to buy the site instead.

"While some ascribe national significance to the Cove, the

FROM BRADY TO BROWN: DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISCUSSIONS

By John-Charles Duffy

BEFORE THE 1950s, the Church did not produce standardized missionary discussions. Instead, missionaries or mission presidents created their own lessons for investigators. (The popular book, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, by LeGrand Richards, began as a series of such lessons.) The Church published the first set of standardized discussions in 1953. There have been four sets of standardized discussions to date.

A Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel (1953). These discussions were written as a series of Socratic dialogues between the missionaries and “Mr. Brady,” an investigator. The lessons relied heavily on logic and scriptural prooftexts, and the dialogues had a tendency to be patronizing and manipulative (reflecting, perhaps, the fact that they were written by missionaries).

The Uniform System for Teaching Investigators (1961). Flannel boards were used to present these lessons, which began with a discussion of why Catholic and Protestant claims to authority are invalid. Again, the discussions were written as a series of dialogues, with the investigator’s—now Mr. Brown’s—expected answers spelled out in the discussions.

The Uniform System for Teaching Families (1973). Sometimes called the “rainbow discussions,” because each discussion was printed on paper of a different color, these lessons were accompanied by flipcharts. Missionaries had to memorize large blocks of text, pausing periodically to ask open-ended questions of the investigator.

The Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel (1986). In these discussions, the amount of text was drastically reduced; missionaries were encouraged to spend more time sharing experiences, bearing testimony, and asking open-ended questions. The first discussion focused not on apostasy and restoration (as in every previous set of standardized discussions), but on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as witnesses of Jesus Christ.

Church is the only entity paying the bills, maintaining and improving the site, and assisting the visiting public,” complains Riverton Wyoming stake president Lloyd Larsen in a recent letter. “This situation has allowed the BLM to control the Cove with little or no cost.”

A bill that would have transferred property to the Church was passed by the House last year but died in the Senate due to opposition by the Wyoming’s congressional delegation.

According to LDS leaders, the BLM site near the Sweetwater River is where several members of a Mormon handcart company died in October 1856. Some scholars contend Martin’s Cove has been erroneously mapped

MISSIONARIES NO LONGER TO MEMORIZE DISCUSSIONS

HOW MANY CANS of decaffeinated Pepsi does it take for an MTC missionary to memorize the discussions? This question ceased to be relevant on 12 January as President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve announced drastic changes in the way missionaries teach investigators.

“We will discontinue asking the missionaries to memorize the six discussions,” said President Packer in a meeting with all MTC employees. “But the missionary discussions are not being phased out; they are a standard.”

Under the new program, called “Teaching by the Spirit,” missionaries will present the content of the discussions by creating personalized outlines based on each investigator’s needs. Piloted about a year ago in several missions, the new teaching approach has proved more effective than the method currently used by LDS missionaries worldwide.

“The missionary should feel free to use his [sic] own words as prompted by the Spirit,” reads a statement by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. “[The missionary]

may depart from the order of the lesson, giving that which he is inspired to do, according to the interests and needs of the investigator.”

It is not yet clear whether the order or contents of the six discussions will be modified, too. As described by John-Charles Duffy in a 1995 Sunstone symposium presentation, the emphasis and contents of the discussions have shifted over time [see sidebar, above].

CHURCH LAUNCHES (YET ANOTHER) WEBSITE

A NEW OFFICIAL Church website dedicated to temporal, spiritual, and emotional well-being, has been launched. The site, <www.providentliving.org>, features LDS resources for employment, social and emotional strength, education, literacy, food storage, and other welfare-related topics.

“The Provident Living Web site provides a wealth of useful information from one convenient, reliable source,” explained LDS spokesman Dale Bills to a *Deseret News* reporter. “People can find answers to their questions to help them live happier, healthier lives.”

One apparent purpose of the new site is to encourage unwed mothers to give their babies up for adoption through LDS Social Services. An online form allows an expectant mother to choose a profile (age, ethnicity, and so on) for the type of family to whom she would like to give their baby. Then the website displays names and photos of couples fitting the profile.

The adoption section also includes more than 100 letters written to birth mothers by hope-to-be parents. “We are happy yet feel our family is not complete,” write Tyler and Sharon, one featured family. “We are praying for you and to find the child that belongs in our home.”

People



DIED: **Virginia Chapman Bourgeois**, star Sunstone volunteer and symposium presenter, 7 January 2003, of a long illness. For years after her retirement as a counselor and caseworker for the state of Utah, Virginia would work one day a week at Sunstone, mostly packaging tapes, books, and magazines, and joking regularly about her developing skills as a mail clerk. With a master's in educational psychology, Virginia's questing spirit and hunger for knowledge prompted a strong interest in comparing Church doctrines with teachings on mysticism, reincarnation, and evolution. A former missionary (two times!), this mother of six, and grandmother or great-grandmother of twenty-three, will be greatly missed for her generous insightful guidance toward peace and fulfillment she so freely shared with her family, clients, and friends, including Sunstone folks.



ARRESTED: **Jay Richard Morrison**, Tremonton, Utah, for allegedly threatening to kill President Gordon B. Hinckley and members of the Quorum of the Twelve. The alleged threats, which include talk of decapitating President Hinckley, have been posted since last July to an online newsgroup. According to police, Morrison believes God has appointed him, not President Hinckley, to preside over the Church.

AWARDED: To **Darius Gray** the Martin Luther King Jr. Award from the Salt Lake offices of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Gray was recognized for his work as president of the Genesis Group (a Church organization for Latter-day Saints of African descent), for a trilogy of historical novels he has co-authored with BYU professor Margaret Blair Young, and for his crucial role in helping turn the Freedman's Bank records into a searchable database. Containing the names of 484,000 former slaves, the CD-Rom is hailed today as one of the most important tools for African-American genealogy.



THRUST INTO THE SPOTLIGHT: when the descent of the space shuttle Columbia turned into tragedy, NASA flight director and LDS Bishop **Ron Dettimore**. As the spokesperson for the disaster, Dettimore called human spaceflight "a passion. . . .When we have an event like today where we lose seven family members, it is devastating for us."

Dettimore's longtime friend Rick Searfoss, a retired LDS astronaut, feels that being an LDS bishop "has prepared [Dettimore] to a large extent for the experience he is going

though now." On 7 February, Dettimore's public role was handed over to the Columbia Accident Investigation Board.

NOMINATED: by the Director's Guild of America, LDS director **Tasha Oldham** for her film *The Smith Family*, which depicts the compelling story of an LDS family that decides to stay together after the husband confesses of extramarital affairs with men and both husband and wife learn they are HIV



positive. Filmed between 1999 and 2001, the documentary is an intimate look at the way Kim Smith, confronts her own illness, supports her 18-year old son as he embarks on an LDS mission, and takes care of her husband Steve all the way through to his last breath as he dies from AIDS.

At a 2002 Sunstone Symposium session, Oldham and Smith spoke of the circumstances that led them to make this movie. "I originally wanted to make a documentary about the lives of Mormon women and to dispel the misconceptions about who they were," said Oldham. "But it became apparent that Kim and her family needed their own story." Smith feels that the "work [of making the documentary] was worth it because the goal has been achieved . . . [to] in some small way help increase awareness. I think we've done that." More information about the documentary, which aired June 2002 as part of PBS's prestigious "Point of View" series, can be found at <<http://www.pbs.org/pov>>. The Sunstone symposium session is available on tape #SL02-374).

APPOINTED: Deseret Book CEO **Sheri Dew**, to serve as White House delegate and private-sector adviser to the Commission on the Status of Women. "I am honored to serve as a delegate assigned to further the positions of President Bush," says Dew. "My recent experience serving in the Relief Society General Presidency has given me a great deal of love for the women of the world as well as appreciation for some of the challenges they face. My hope is that that experience will prove helpful to the commission."



ADVANCED: 17-year-old LDS teenager, **Carmen Rasmusen**, to the finals of FOX television's hit show, *American Idol*. Rasmusen, who lives in Bountiful, Utah, will compete against eleven other finalists, hoping to advance from week to week



and eventually be named the next American Idol, following in the shoes of last season's winner, Kelly Clarkson. In a short Q&A biographical profile on the show's website, <www.idolonfox.com>, Rasmusen answers the question, "What are your goals in life?" with the answer, "To become as cool as my mom and

raise a happy family." Her answer to the query, "What would people be surprised to learn about you?" she responds, "I'm a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Celluloid Watch

One Lord, One Faith, Two Lehi's

THE DECEMBER 2002 SUNSTONE reported on Gary Roger's project, *The Book of Mormon Movie, Volume 1*. As it turns out, another Book of Mormon film, with an \$8 million budget, is being developed by a different team. Directed by Peter Johnson, *A Voice from the Dust* will tell the Book of Mormon story in several installments. The first episode, *Journey to the Promised Land*, is scheduled to begin shooting summer 2003.

Johnson has already scouted locations in Yemen, where he recently filmed a FARMS-produced documentary that followed Lehi's path through the Arabian desert. "As I worked on [the documentary], a sense of taking this profound information to the 'next level' gradually grew to an obvious conclusion," wrote Johnson for *Meridian* magazine. "Not only should this scholarly documentary be made, but the grand, epic, dramatic, theatrical motion picture should also be made."

More information about the project is available at <www.voicefromthedust.com>.

Video Revisits Life of Nazi Dissenter



(L to R): Rudolf Wobbe, Helmuth Huebener, and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe

A NEW DOCUMENTARY tells of a 16-year-old Mormon who was arrested and executed in Germany in 1942. Just released by Covenant Communications in video and DVD format, *Truth & Conviction* tells the story of Helmuth Huebener (also spelled "Hubener" and "Huebner"), who between 1941 and 1942 produced 29 fliers denouncing Hitler and the Nazi regime.

According to the documentary, young Huebener typed some of the leaflets on the typewriter belonging to his LDS branch and recruited two fellow Mormons to distribute them. In doing so, Huebener alienated some Church members, including his branch president, a member of the Nazi party, who excommunicated the young political dissenter shortly after his 1942 arrest. Huebener's membership was reinstated posthumously in 1946 with a note that reads, "Excommunicated by mistake."

Huebener's life has been the subject of several articles, books, and an award-winning play by Thomas F. Rogers. An article, "The Führer's New Clothes: Helmuth Huebener and the Mormons in the Third Reich" by Alan F. Keele and Douglas F. Tobler, was published in the November 1980 SUNSTONE.

Documentary Depicts LDS Family, Gay Son

WHEN THEN-BYU film student Brad Barber had to choose a topic for his senior project, he went home for the Christmas break and there filmed his own family, which includes his parents, his siblings—and his gay brother Troy. The result is *Troy through a Window*, a feature-length documentary exploring the dynamics of an LDS family where a model son, Eagle Scout, and returned missionary also happens to be gay.

"On the day Troy came out as a gay man, it was as if a window had dropped through our household" says Barber, "placing Troy on one side, siblings and parents on the other. We could see through that window—we were still in the same home—but some effort had to be made to reach through it."



One interesting aspect of this movie is the filmmaker's intimate access to his subjects. "This is an extremely personal film," says Barber. "I'd say we are a little nervous [about the release]; it's not easy to feel at ease pouring out your soul in front of a camera and an audience of strangers."

Barber hopes the film will "open up some meaningful and much needed dialogue between gays and lesbians and their families." "So far, I have gotten warm responses from both camps," he says.

People interested in purchasing the documentary may contact Barber at <entropyfilm@hotmail.com>.

Dutcher's Army Conquers Mexico



IT WASN'T AN easy battle, but a Spanish-language version of Richard Dutcher's *God's Army*, titled *El Ejército de Dios*, has finally been released in Mexico. According to Dutcher, because the film had already been dubbed in Spanish—not just subtitled—and because Excel Entertainment is a new distributor in Mexico, the release was very hard to achieve. "It's been an uphill battle," Dutcher

told the *Deseret News*. "Regulatory forces in the Mexican government had us jump through a lot of hoops."

Dutcher served an LDS mission in Veracruz from 1984–86.

Frodo Gets a Mission Call

Elijah Wood, who plays Frodo Baggins in the mega-blockbuster trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, will replace the "One Ring" with a CTR ring for an upcoming role. According to several websites, Wood will star in *Thumbsucker*, a film based on the novel by LDS author Walter Kirn (Doubleday, 1999). *Thumbsucker* describes the life of Justin Cobb, a Minnesota teenager who replaces his thumb-sucking addiction with prescription medications, alcohol, smoking, fly-fishing, work, and sex. Cobb eventually converts to Mormonism and goes on an LDS mission.



For more information on these and other LDS-themed movies, visit <www.ldsfilm.com>.

Solar Flares

Are We Mainstream Yet? Survey Says: “No!” According to a survey by the Institute for Jewish and Community research, 56 percent of Americans see Mormons as holding values and beliefs that are markedly dissimilar to their own. The study, based on responses from 1,103 randomly selected adults nationwide, revealed that exactly the same percentage of Americans also perceive Muslims as different from themselves.

“It would be nice to imagine people think members of the [LDS Church] live in a way that others aspire to,” says LDS spokesman Wes Andersen about the survey, “but I’m not certain that’s what we’re seeing here.”

BYU Professor John Livingston wonders if the word “Mormon” rather than “LDS” in the survey may have slanted the results. “As a mission president in Detroit,” Livingston says, “I found that people didn’t recognize LDS as the same religion as Mormon.”

Smile that Frown Away. A recent ABC television special about the pornography industry featured a 20-year-old LDS woman from Utah who, two years ago, moved to California to become a porn star. A significant portion of the show, which aired 23 January, followed the rise of Michelle Sinclair, who goes by the stage name Belladonna.



In a porn industry newsletter interview, Sinclair once answered the question, “How does a good Mormon girl become a porn star?” by saying, “When it’s repressed your whole life, it just comes spilling out.” However, her deep ambivalence toward her chosen profession surfaced when after she smilingly described to reporter Diane Sawyer the sexual acts that she has been required to perform during her career, Sawyer asked her why she always smiles. The question caused the young star to break down in tears. “I’m not happy,” Sinclair confessed. “I don’t like myself at all.”

Just the Facts, Especially the Celebratory Ones. Fifty pages longer and one dollar more expensive than its 2001–2002 predecessor, the *Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac* has finally hit the stands. It returns as a yearly publication (rather than

biannual), and for the first time ever, it is also available on CD-Rom. The new almanac includes a section about the 2002 Winter Olympics (pages 125–41) and another about the dedication of the Nauvoo Temple (pages 142–50). Among other factoids, in this edition, we learn that as of October 2002, the Church has 11.6 million members, that ten LDS athletes participated in the 2002 Winter Games, and that the Church currently operates 114 temples—75 of which have been dedicated by President Gordon B. Hinckley. Although the Almanac’s first edition appeared in 1974, the idea of a Mormon yearbook goes back to 1854 when William W. Phelps began regular publication of the *Deseret Almanac*.

The Osbournes Meet the Mormons. How ironic would it be for MTV’s most outrageous family, the Osbournes, to end up with a Mormon son-in-law? Perhaps not all that far-fetched an idea, considering that Bert McCracken, Kelly Osbourne’s boyfriend, is as much of a die-hard rocker as she is. A recovering drug addict from “a strict Mormon home,” McCracken is a vocalist with *The Used*, a Utah band that recently upgraded from a run-down Orem garage to a posh Los Angeles recording studio. “Music and the Mormon Church I grew up with ultimately have the same function,” says McCracken. “It’s all about faith.”

Fight for the Right to Be Arty. In a state where conservative religious views often clash with national trends, a field trip to “Sin City” by a group of high school students turned into a major debate about education, temptation, repression, and rebellion. When the Mt. Nebo School Board banned some 50 students from visiting exhibits of rare and valuable artworks in Las Vegas, a group of Springville parents decided to charter a bus and make the trip without official school sanction. Their actions inspired parents from other nearby schools, doubling the size of the original group.

Enjoying the extra publicity the story gave to his city, Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman met the students in person, giving them a red carpet reception. The children then visited a rare collection of Faberge eggs at the Bellagio Hotel and an exhibit at the Venetian Hotel titled “Art through the Ages: Masterpieces of Painting from Titian to Picasso.”

Popular *Salt Lake Tribune* columnist Robert Kirby “chaperoned” the students on the trip and reported: “The closest we got to sin were some slot machines near the exit of the Guggenheim. I stood guard to make sure the kids did not stray anywhere near them, losing eight bucks in the bargain.”

NOT OF ANY PRIVATE INTERPRETATION

IN A RARE move, LDS spokesman Dale Bills came forward to correct ultra-conservative Utah lobbyist Gayle Ruzycka about the Church’s stance toward a proposed “hate crimes” law that would have imposed heavier penalties on crimes committed against people because of their race, religion, nationality, or sexual orientation. Bills had originally stated simply that the Church did “not oppose” the Utah hate crimes bill; editorials

in the Church-owned *Deseret News* and on KSL 5 explicitly supported the legislation.

Ruzycka suggested that LDS leaders came out with the “non-opposition” stance merely in an attempt to quash rumors that they were endorsing the bill. Not so, says Bills. “Our statement declared that the Church does not oppose [the bill] as drafted. Period. Any interpretation beyond that is speculative.”

Originally passed by the Utah legislature on a 38-35 vote but later recalled, the bill will not be revisited until next year.

BYU News

University Allowing War Dissent. BYU student Caleb Prouix is taking a public and active stance against the pending U.S.-led war against Iraq. So far, he has passed out antiwar armbands, organized two “teach-ins,” and has plans to put together several formal debates. Although approved by school administrators, the events, one on campus and one off, have been carefully labeled as not expressing the official views of the school or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

During one of the gatherings, after citing a recent *Deseret News* poll showing that Utahns were highly in favor of going to war, German and Slavic languages professor Gary Browning challenged students to think before just going along with the wave: “We are a culture that tends to run ahead of others in terms of using force. I’d like us not always to be in the highest percentage of people ready to engage in war.” Anticipating a question many students might have, BYU history professor Ignacio Garcia said, “Is my stand on the war consistent with the views of BYU and the beliefs of Latter-day Saints? I am very comfortable saying yes.”

New Guidelines for Instructional Materials. In December 2002, BYU officials released a new set of guidelines for the university’s faculty, urging them to use only “appropriate” instructional materials in classrooms and to always teach “in the context of gospel values.” The new policy, four years in the making, specifically states professors are not to require students to view unedited R-rated films.

In an interview with the *Salt Lake Tribune*, BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins indicated that the new document is not a “prescription for how faculty need to run their classrooms,” adding that professors will not be disciplined for every infraction. However, according to the new rules, those “who repeatedly choose inappropriate materials or who present materials in inappropriate ways [will be] counseled.”

“Porn 101” Won’t be Coming to Y. BYU president Merrill J. Bateman made a veiled reference to a controversial Wesleyan University class taught by women’s studies professor Hope Weissman, as he denounced the “disturbing and damaging” trend on college campuses of offering so-called “Porn 101” classes—university courses that analyze pornography from a scholarly viewpoint and sometimes require students to produce a work of pornography as a final project.

President Bateman asserted that offering courses like this represents “the opposite of what the university’s role should be.” His remarks came in February 2003 during “Cyber Secrets,” a BYU conference, now in its second year, exploring the harmful effects of pornography and advising students how to avoid it.

Following Complaint, Scene Cut from Film. The Cyber Secrets conference described above took place the same weekend the Harold B. Lee Library screened *Manon des Sources*, a French film containing a non-sexualized scene of a 16-year-old girl dancing in the nude. Although the Motion

Picture Association had assigned the film a PG rating, a father of two students complained about the scene, prompting officials to delete it from subsequent screenings. But, because of the scene’s pivotal role in the story, librarians and members of the French faculty felt compelled to still describe it to viewers. According to associate university librarian Julene Butler, BYU’s legal counsel advised the library they could legally skip the scene because the film was shown for educational purposes.

KBYU Pulls Show on Reparative Therapy. Amid complaints from gay activists, BYU’s television station decided not to broadcast a presentation that would have described homosexuality as “a serious addiction.” The presentation was originally made at BYU by Orem psychotherapist Jeff Robinson as part of the Families Under Fire conference. Robinson is an advocate for reparative therapy, a controversial treatment that is supposed to help gay men change their sexual orientation.

Michael Mitchell, executive director of the gay political action group Unity Utah, was one of those voicing complaints against the show. “I find [the notion of changing sexual orientation] really offensive,” said Mitchell. “I believe God loves us exactly how we are.” According to KBYU’s marketing director Jim Bell, the decision to yank the broadcast was made by KBYU and not by the Church.

Lecture and Panel Tackle Recent DNA Challenge to Book of Mormon Authenticity. In a lecture dealing with faith, science, and DNA, a BYU professor refuted the notion that the inability to find Middle Eastern DNA compromises the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The event comes almost one year after anthropology professor Thomas Murphy first published an article suggesting that because of the lack of DNA evidence linking Native Americans to the Middle East, the Church needs to abandon its claim that today’s Native Americans descend from the peoples described in the Book of Mormon.

During the 29 January lecture, BYU biology professor Michael Whiting proposed at least two genetic theories that could account for the loss of Semitic genetic markers among Native American populations. Whiting also mentioned that the reason for the relatively slow response to Murphy’s claims is that “we didn’t think his arguments were good enough to respond to.”

Murphy, who was not allowed to participate in a panel discussion that followed the lecture, sent an open letter to Whiting defending his research and expressing dismay at the nature of the lecture and discussion: “I am deeply disappointed that someone of your stature in the field would resort to such blatant misrepresentations of my research and that of other leading non-Mormon scholars just to advance a religious agenda.” Murphy’s research received wide media attention last November and December, when ecclesiastical leaders in Lynwood, Washington, threatened him with Church disciplinary procedures over his article. In a recent development, Murphy has announced that he’s met again with his stake president who has now cancelled any plans for actions against his Church membership.

NEW MAGAZINE SHINES SPOTLIGHT ON LDS TEACHINGS AND SUBCULTURE

A NEW MAGAZINE, *Mormon Focus*, is about to make its debut on the LDS landscape. The first of its kind, the magazine will be centered on early Mormon teachings, principles, and practices and Latter-day Saints who today try to live them. Yet it is intended to be read by more than just LDS fundamentalists and the historians and social scientists who study this Mormon subculture.

The idea for *Mormon Focus* was generated by the positive reactions its founders, Shane Whelan and Anne Wilde, have received to their recent books. Responses from mainstream Latter-day Saints to Whelan's *More Than One: Plural Marriage—A Sacred Heritage, a Promise for Tomorrow* and Wilde's co-authored work, *Voices in Harmony: Contemporary Women Celebrate Plural Marriage* have convinced them that many Church members, more than just Fundamentalist Mormons, have a significant interest in early Restoration doctrines and practices. [For more on Whelan's book and the official Church reaction, see SUNSTONE, Dec. 2002, p. 74.]



Mormon Focus hopes to change perceptions of those who are trying to live the "fullness of the gospel"

The magazine will feature articles on contemporary social issues, LDS doctrine and history, and personal faith journeys, and will have regular sections ranging from health to government to family law, tips for home schooling, humor, and a kid's corner. The founders hope *Mormon Focus* will continue to improve perceptions about LDS fundamentalists that followed in the wake of their two books and has continued through the media coverage of the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics and

more open efforts by Utah officials to engage the state's fundamentalist communities in constructive dialogue. Wilde states: "Other than a family structure with more than one wife, I believe readers will find the people and groups we feature to be quite normal—loving, spiritual, concerned for their children, and very active in community service."

Scheduled for an April 2003 launch, *Mormon Focus* will be a 64-page, full-color, bi-monthly publication with a cover price of \$5.95. A six-issue subscription is \$29.95. For more information, visit <www.mormonfocus.com>, or call 801-733-7450.

FAITH-PROMOTING RUMORS

WHEN BYU PROFESSOR Margaret Blair Young read a *Salt Lake Tribune* article stating that black Mormon pioneer Elijah Abel had been born in 1808, fled to Canada at age 23, obtained free papers, and later worked on the underground railroad, she knew someone had read as a biography the historical novel she had co-written with Darius Gray, *Standing on the Promises*.

"I am in a rather awkward position today of seeing . . . my own conjectures about Elijah Abel touted as facts," Young wrote. In an email to Association for Mormon Letters members that was also published in the Autumn 2002 issue of AML's journal, *Irreantum*, Young set the record straight, explaining that Abel's year of birth is uncertain, that no one knows whether he was born a slave or a free man, when he went to Canada, or whether he obtained free papers.

Abel's life has been in the news because of the novel and a monument unveiled at Abel's gravesite last September (See SUNSTONE, Oct. 2002, p. 75).

LDS DRAMATISTS LAUNCH THEATRICAL SOCIETY

AT A TIME when many investors worry about the stock market, LDS playwright Thom Duncan decided to invest his savings in Mormon theatre. The fruit of his effort is the recently launched Nauvoo Theatrical Society—an Orem, Utah, playhouse where LDS actors, playwrights, and spectators can celebrate the richness and diversity of Mormon dramatic arts.

Since last September, the group has staged an updated version of Carol Lynn Pearson's *My Turn on Earth; Joyful Noise*, Tim Slover's moving exploration of the events surrounding the composition of George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*; and *The Way We're Wired*, Eric Samuelsen's fun and insightful treatment of the issues facing LDS singles in a family church. The award-winning play *Stones*, by J. Scott Bronson, is set to begin March 20.



NTS founders, Thom Duncan (left) and J. Scott Bronson

Dismissing the myth that "there aren't any Mormon plays," the Society's list of potential projects includes 40 works by playwrights such as James Arrington, Davidson Cheney, Tom Rogers, and Tim Slover. "Some of these plays have existed for 25 years," says Duncan, "but there are no venues for them. We can probably go for 10 years without repeating ourselves."

Duncan, who majored in theatre at BYU, rented space in downtown Orem and transformed it into a playhouse. He found support from long-time friend J. Scott Bronson and BYU theater professor Paul Duerden. Joining these three on the board of trustees are: Steve Quesenberry, Erick Ardmore, Davison Cheney, and Richard Dutcher.

Why did they name their endeavor "Nauvoo Theatrical Society"? "We wanted it to be obvious that is a Mormon theater, and we wanted it to have a friendly historical feeling and an old-sounding name," says Bronson. "And every time we get a new cast, we truly become a society of brothers and sisters, giving a gift to whomever comes to see the show."

"We're betting on the fact that there is an audience [for our plays], says Bronson. "We hope that when the audiences discover the richness of Mormon theater, they'll want to see it."

The Nauvoo Theatrical Society is located at 50 West Center Street in Orem, Utah. Telephone: (801) 225-3800.