

FROM THE EDITOR

TRANSPARENCY

By Dan Wotherspoon

PUTTING TOGETHER THIS magazine issue has caused me more sleepless nights than usual. There are some obvious reasons for the extra stress. It's being sent to press just six weeks following our May issue. And it contains a twenty-four-page, hashed-out-with-sweat-and-blood, symposium preliminary program that represents hundreds of hours of roller-coastering highs and lows.¹

The peaks in organizing our symposiums come as the wonderful and funny, the wonderful and sad, and the wonderful and challenging proposals arrive, and when panels begin to take shape or we hit on what we think is a good angle for approaching a topic. The valleys come as promising sessions fall through or special invitations aren't answered—or are answered weeks later with polite declines. And there's the angst of trying to schedule participants in their “dream time slots” and be faithful to all their “only schedule me at's.” Although accommodating work and travel schedules is an expected part of any conference organizer's duties, such things make havoc as well as several super-loaded program times for which we can't balance the range of topics as well as we'd like.

The less-obvious factors causing my insomnia are the kind that perhaps only the rest of the SUNSTONE staff and I, as the main shepherds of *this* issue, might notice—and sweat about. As an editorial team, we try very hard to include a wide array of voices and topics in each magazine issue. And usually, with eighty pages to work with, we can. But when you take away twenty-four pages for a symposium program, only fifty-six are left. Factor in that this is the tenth-anniversary year of a major earthquake for Mormon scholars and that we would not be doing our job well without somehow acknowledging and wrestling with it. So we felt we needed to publish in this issue the exchange between Lavina Fielding Anderson and Armand Mauss (begins page 14). Subtract those eleven pages, and we have only forty-five remaining.

Next consider that this is now Sunstone's twenty-ninth year and we really should finish running the articles commissioned for its twenty-fifth anniversary! We're already late running the final installment, having

bumped it from its promised spot in the May issue in order to create more room for our early-returned missionary coverage and race in the Church discussion.² Subtract that article's sixteen pages, and only twenty-nine pages remain for news, letters, Cornucopia, a couple of essays and columns—all the things you, our readers, tell us you enjoy most.

Though I have worried about all these things, I'd be lying if I said they were the main reasons I've been losing sleep. No, what's kept me awake is really something in this issue, and my growing feeling for several weeks that I need to somehow address it in this editorial. So here goes.

SUNSTONE'S current board of directors, with the staff's full support and agreement, have felt it important to become a much more transparent organization. Toward that end, we've held “Sunstone Town Meeting” sessions at recent Salt Lake symposiums (and will again this year). We've been more proactive in trying to visit with supporters in focus group settings in conjunction with regional symposiums. For the past two years, we've posted on our website, <www.sunstoneonline.com>, past budget reports and the current-year's projected budget.

These moves are completely appropriate. We're a non-profit organization that can survive only through the generous support of those who value our work, enjoy the magazines we put out and conferences we organize, and like us, trust that faith and understanding are well-served by discussion and a free exchange of ideas and experiences—even if they are sometimes uncomfortable to hear and confront. Our supporters should see how much and where we spend


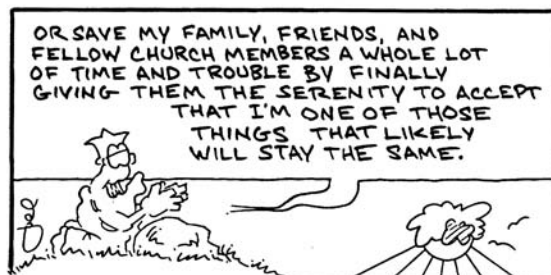
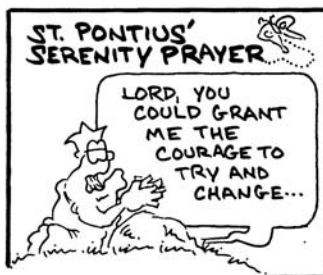
money. Our readers should know how many subscribers we have and how efforts to retain current and find new subscribers are going. Perhaps you've noticed these increased efforts to be more public and clear about where we are and where we hope to lead Sunstone.

Well, Gary Bergera's history in this issue of Sunstone from 1993 to 2001 pushes our organizational commitment to greater transparency further than we might be fully comfortable with, for it shows Sunstone more bare and vulnerable than you've likely ever known it. Yet you, our supporters, must be given the chance to confront us even at our worst, to see even our most difficult hours.

There are many ways to read Sunstone's past. Previous installments in the anniversary series have reported challenging moments, but by and large, most were either the kind of financial crises one might expect any small, non-profit organization would, at times, face, or they were challenges that largely arose from outside pressures—the Church's “statement on symposia” and the early-1990s turmoil in LDS intellectual circles that followed in its wake. If you are a Sunstone supporter, perhaps you read of the various trials and quickly determined that yep, Sunstone's a winner, a pesky survivor, that through determination and pluck has stood its ground and proved itself in the midst of the refiner's fire. We who are closely involved with the organization would never want to persuade you otherwise!

But what happened during the period following the Church's public comments about symposia and the wave of disciplinary actions that rolled through intellectual circles? Some might see these years as a relatively calm period. The rhetoric had toned down—but what about the pressures?

It's this immediately post September Six period that Bergera's article covers. Of course, as Bergera notes, his telling of the history of these years is “certainly not what some of [the key figures involved] would have produced” (page 38, note 1). But it nevertheless gives a glimpse of genuine personal and organizational torment.


Pontius' Puddle


JOEL KAUFFMANN

Now, I'm very comfortable having you know of the fierce struggles and debates about Sunstone's mission and philosophy. They're still going on. And we'd love to have each of you share your own views on them. What has kept me up these nights has been thinking about the parts of Bergera's history that reveal how deeply someone was hurt through this period—hurt by friends, with the kind of wound that heals only very slowly. I'm talking, of course, about Elbert Peck.

WHILE thinking about what happened with Elbert at Sunstone, I came to a horrifying conclusion



WORDS OF MORMONS

Can't Find a Book?

These stores specialize in out-of-print and hard-to-find LDS books

BENCHMARK BOOKS

3269 S. Main, Suite 250
Salt Lake City, UT 84115.
801/486-3111; 800/486-3112 toll free for
orders <<http://www.benchmarkbooks.com>>
email: benchmarkbooks@mcleodusa.net
Buy, Sell, Trade

KEN SANDERS RARE BOOKS

268 S. 200 E., Salt Lake City, UT 84111
801/521-3819; fax 801/521-2606
email: <ken@dreamgarden.com>
<<http://www.kensandersbooks.com>>
appraisals, catalog, mail orders
search service, credit cards
10 A.M. –6 P.M., Monday–Saturday

SAM WELLER'S ZION BOOKSTORE

*Thousands of rare and out of print titles on
Utah, the Mormons, and the West.*
254 S. Main, Salt Lake City, UT 84101
801/328-2586; 800/333-SAMW
email: <books@samwellers.com>
<<http://www.samwellers.com>>
appraisals, catalog, mail orders, special orders
search service, delivery service, credit cards
*The largest collection of new, used,
and rare LDS titles anywhere.*

that, at first, mostly fed my frustration about the lack of greater variety in this issue: *Our cover story, the exchange between Anderson and Mauss, is, in several striking ways, the SAME tale Bergera's article tells!* But worries about not having more diversity in the magazine's fewer-than-usual number of pages quickly receded as I thought more about the nature of the stories both tell. In their own ways, each teaches us (again!) the shake-our-heads truth that organizations, although full of good people with sincere desires to help, often act abusively. Even organizations whose members try very hard to be aware of such tensions and break through to more enlightened patterns.

In the history, Elbert is quoted as saying, "Who made the board of trustees the high council of Sunstone?" Now, at first glance, comparing a board of trustees with a high council doesn't seem far-fetched. Only after repeatedly encountering his statement through my editing passes did I really begin to get what Elbert means. But I probably should have understood sooner, for the interpretive key follows immediately: "I told [the board], 'I'm never going to be sent out of the room again like that.' To have a discussion whether to keep me or not is one thing, but hours-long discussions of philosophy and I'm no longer part of the collaboration, [is another]. . . (32).

Now, here's the rub. I'm certain no one on the board then consciously realized how badly Elbert felt at being dismissed from vision and Sunstone mission discussions. As I mentioned above, even though by the late '90s Church and scholar relations seemed on the surface a bit calmer, these were still very stressful times—at Sunstone, and for the intellectual community. Many still felt uncertain; no one was quite sure exactly how to act. Do we push for clearer guidelines about "acceptable" scholarship? Do we increase efforts to be understood by Church leaders, or would we be better off trying to fly below the radar screen? And in the minds of Sunstone board members, it was critical that Sunstone have a united plan with which to meet the challenges of the new climate.

But there was a problem. Elbert himself had been a casualty of the earlier clashes. Stresses from two separate initiatives that could have resulted in his excommunication, and his own decision to be more upfront about his homosexuality, had taken their toll. He had been serving as editor, publisher, and executive director and was burning out, failing to meet deadlines. He was down and vulnerable.

Certainly, some of Elbert's pain was self-inflicted. He'd been warring with himself for some time about stepping down, about

walking away from his dream job. But still, when he called to the board, his friends, for help, they responded with all the right words, and, I'm certain, meant them. But ultimately, Elbert, like many people involved in individual-versus-institutional binds of the sort Anderson and Mauss discuss, ended up feeling disenfranchised and unempowered to speak on his own behalf. As he put it, he felt as if he had met a high council.

Now in discussing this, I am not making a sweeping criticism of high councils but rather commenting on the tendency I believe we Church members have to shy away from speaking directly to those with whom we disagree, to those we accuse of various failings. I think we *think* we are doing well at that; we have procedures that are supposed to assure such face-to-face discussions take place. But we're not; they don't.

It isn't fully clear exactly what happened at Sunstone during Elbert's final few years, and, like Bergera, my take here is "certainly not what some of [the key figures involved] would have produced." But clearly, even with no malice in any player's heart, even though so much was framed in the language of appreciation and love and valuing, Elbert felt betrayed by things that took place.

Yes. Decisions needed to be made and Sunstone needed to be preserved to live another day. And we are living, moving forward. Yet in my late-night tossings, my prayers are for grace. Grace for Elbert, that his heart might soon heal. Grace for Sunstone, that we might be forgiven for our humanness, our frailty. Grace for all who struggle to make themselves more fully known. ☺

NOTES

1. My great thanks to the rest of the Sunstone staff, Carol, John, and William. We all share the burdens (and theirs involves the extra load of a stressed-out and cranky editor), but too often, I'm the one who gets all the attention. This issue of the magazine has also added particular stresses and a far more than usual number of "can you put a rush on this?" requests to our news editor, Hugo Olaiz, and our primary outside reader, John-Charles Duffy. Thanks so much to all of you for your exceptional good humor and ability to roll with the punches.

2. It has taken several years and many, many pages, to bring the Sunstone history stories to press. And I've loved working with all of the authors and the articles I've had the chance to push along the publishing path. But since this editorial is about transparency, I will admit to being very happy this issue contains the last one! The histories have begun to feel so conspicuous to me, a bit too much like we're navel gazing. I've loved getting to know the many people and stories that have contributed to Sunstone's legacy, but I will be very happy to try to fill our pages with more forward-looking pieces, fresh explorations, the best new thinking.