

## FROM THE EDITOR

## STATE OF THE BODY

By Dan Wotherspoon

We offer a hearty vote of thanks to Michael Austin for his great help as SUNSTONE's book review editor for the past several years. Michael, an associate professor of English at Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, will continue as a regular SUNSTONE columnist.

We're excited to welcome Brad Woodworth to the SUNSTONE editorial team, succeeding Michael in working with book reviewers. Brad holds bachelor's and master's degrees from BYU and Harvard and a doctorate in Russian history from Indiana University. Brad has published reviews in SUNSTONE and Dialogue and is a frequent participant in Sunstone symposiums. He currently lives in New Haven, Connecticut, with his wife, Cherie, and their daughter.

Always enthusiastic, Brad brings wonderful, fresh energy to this new "calling" (well, the pay's the same). If you are interested in reviewing books for SUNSTONE, please email him at: <bradley.woodworth@yale.edu>.

FOR THE PAST couple of months, I've been planning to write this editorial about the results of the survey we passed out at the 2003 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. And that's what I've done—mostly. But the deadline for this editorial coincides with my three-year anniversary with Sunstone. And, as do most anniversaries, this one has cast its reflective shade over my mind and heart. Time to take stock, time to try to make whatever course corrections those evaluations suggest. So some of my anniversary reflections are also part of this editorial. The two topics are nice complements for each other, but I think they work best presented in reverse order.

AS PART OF the application process for the SUNSTONE editor's job, finalists were asked to write a "not-more-than-ten-double-spaced-page essay" that, in Elbert Peck's words, didn't have to be "brilliantly original, for obviously much of what Sunstone is about has already been thought of and expressed." Still, we were to give our "take and perspective." Our essays were to focus on several issues concerning the magazine, but also on the

general question: what is the Sunstone Foundation, and why is it important?

During my anniversary mullings, I began thinking about my application essay—and, somehow, found it in my, um, "files." (Those who have seen my office know I use that term very loosely.) As I re-read the essay, my first reaction was embarrassment over the somewhat lofty tone I had used in a few spots. And, clearly, I had failed to be "brilliantly original." Still, I find I still like some of the ideas I'd played with there. Were I writing that essay today, I imagine I would come close to saying many of the same things.

I've chosen to share the following section of my essay partly in response to Joseph Romney's letter in this issue. In response to the "Why We Stay?" reflections in the October 2003 issue, Romney expresses his "disappointment that none of the five essays include a forthright declaration that 'we stay' because we believe that the Church is basically what it claims to be" (p. 2).

From my application essay:

At times through the years, I have wondered what a common testimony (if there is such a thing) among Sunstone participants and supporters might be. I am certain that any standard confession of "I know the Church is true" would not be the first thought for many. "I know the Church has many truths" might be a bit closer but still not it. I have decided that for most it might fundamentally be, "I know the Church is home." I like that metaphor, and I know Sunstone has played a major role in my learning to value the Church, in every sense of the word, as my home. . . .

Home: a place for fierce loyalty and communion, but also where children of wildly different temperaments can each explore her or his individuality. What a boring dinner table it would be without family members sharing the highlights of their very different days! Home: a place for the best wrestles. How can we really love a brother or a God that we haven't tested ourselves against again and again? . . . Home: a place where

family takes the forefront. Oh sure, our family might seem sort of weird at times, but it is ours, and it is good, and, by golly, we are going to fight for it! Home: the place where we have learned at the feet of our parents and older brothers and sisters what it ultimately means to be a "grownup." Home: the place where we learn that we are worthy of unconditional love. . . .

A true family does not believe it can be whole without Tommy, Jake, Liz, or Sarah, even though they are struggling through their adolescent years or feel a bit frustrated by the way things are going at home right now. I believe the vast majority of those for whom Sunstone plays an important role want to feel at home in their church. Sunstone very much is, and should be, about strengthening these feelings.

I appreciate Brother Romney's letter and his wondering about why a certain flavor of testimony might have been missing from those essays. And I don't know what he might generate in an attempt to articulate an inclusive, bottom-line, common-denominator testimony phrase for Sunstone-interested-folk. But even years later, I still like the theme of "home" landing somewhere in that mix. Yet I would very likely change my, "I know the Church is home" more toward an "I hope the Church can be a true home for me."

My sense of Sunstone survey data, from this year's symposium and that which has been gathered all the way back to Sunstone's early years, is that Sunstone has a core constituency of believers and hopefuls—folks who, for a wide variety of reasons, want to stay, want to fight for a home. Plenty of Sunstoners would feel fine about saying, "I stay because I believe the Church is basically what it claims to be." Many others wouldn't, but I sense that nearly all of us would admit to at least some small remnant of hope of, "Oh, but if it only could be all it claims to be. I would surely love to live in that home."

I MUST have been in a metaphor mood while I wrote that application essay, for I played with a second one as well:

If as the Doctrine and Covenants says, the "body hath need of every member, that all may be edified together" (D&C 84:110), to what part of the body might Sunstone best be compared? What role does Sunstone serve in furthering the overall health of the body of Christ? I have tentatively settled on the notion that Sunstone's role is much like that performed by *skin*. . . .



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and rare LDS titles anywhere.*

Many Sunstone supporters presently consider themselves, or are considered by others, to be on the margins: the place, like our skin, in closest contact with the outside world. Skin is also our most vulnerable organ—permeable and tender, yet also protective and tough. . . . Skin is sensitive—one of our best warning systems. Sometimes danger is signaled by our hair standing on end, or our skin becoming clammy; skin is often the organ where we first feel pressure or come to experience pain. Sunstone, by being alert to so much going on in so many areas, serves the Church well as one of its most sensitive organs. It is also through our skin that we most quickly give expression to our fantastic diversity as human beings. Sunstone understands that no two fingerprints are alike, no two complexions are exactly the same. . . .

When Sunstone is working best—as directed by its mission statement—giving expression to the “rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life,” it also serves much like skin. At times, the expressions it hosts are extremely tender, at times, quite toughly worded. It is also by way of our skin that we are most vulnerable to the sting of the gadfly, and the Church is well-served by Sunstone as it sponsors forums that allow the artist, storyteller, historian, essayist, poet, and humorist to perform their enlivening roles. No work is a worthy effort if it does not cause a variety of reactions, if it does not engender discussion and, in President Hugh B. Brown’s words, “more thinking.” . . . All complacency must be stung to attention, all of us must be aroused to consider how much further we have still yet to travel.

The body has need of each of its members. To each is given a gift, which, in turn, is to be shared with the whole. Sunstone must continue to support each giver in such a way that her or his gift might be both given and received.

I’m far less likely now, three years later, to have written of Sunstone’s “skin-like” role in terms so obviously externally aimed. As I re-read my old words, I picture myself practically jumping up and down, convinced that if I just had the chance to make this case, “the Church” might listen and give Sunstone accolades for serving as resident gadfly.

I don’t think I’ve imagined that reaction for more than just a few minutes once I actu-

ally began sitting in this chair. But what I still like about the Sunstone-as-skin metaphor is its emphasis on diversity: no two fingerprints alike; each individual feeling different things; each member of the body reacting differently to things it’s sensitized to, whether its “hair standing on end” or (I wish I’d added it then!) the unmatched sensation of a caress or loving touch. No, Sunstone has become far too personal to me to spend a lot of time imagining its platform potentialities, or to think of aiming a megaphone at that big building three blocks down and three blocks over from our offices.

EVERY time I look at Sunstone survey results, I’m glad for the reminders it contains. The surveys remind me of our individualness more than our groupness, our “member”-ness above our “Church”-ness. I can’t help but locate myself in the data, and it’s always a great reality check to note that my interests and sense of what’s under- or over-emphasized in our forums don’t match with many of yours.

Each tick mark on a survey gives only the briefest hint of a personal story. As you view the numbers that follow, I hope you will stop in each section or query to find yourself. Then, as you do, fill in the details. We’d love to hear your story, your report of what is happening in your part of the body.

THE FOLLOWING DATA is excerpted from ninety-one stories we collected at the 2003 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, held 13–16 August at the Salt Lake Sheraton City Centre Hotel. Not all respondents answered every question. Our great thanks to Elise Eggett, a volunteer at the symposium who compiled the data into a very cool report (available on the Sunstone website, <[www.sunstoneonline.com](http://www.sunstoneonline.com)>).

#### AGE OF 2003 SYMPOSIUM ATTENDEES

|     |                              |
|-----|------------------------------|
| 6%  | under age 25                 |
| 7%  | age 25–34                    |
| 8%  | age 35–44                    |
| 14% | age 45–54                    |
| 35% | age 55–64                    |
| 30% | age 65 or older <sup>1</sup> |

#### EDUCATION LEVELS OF ATTENDEES

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 22% | graduate degree, professional            |
| 33% | graduate degree, academic                |
| 34% | bachelor’s degree                        |
| 11% | high school or some college <sup>2</sup> |

#### GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF ATTENDEES

|       |                          |
|-------|--------------------------|
| 62.5% | live in Utah             |
| 25%   | live in the western U.S. |

9% live in the eastern U.S.  
3.5% live outside the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

NUMBER OF PAST SALT LAKE OR REGIONAL SYMPOSIUMS ATTENDED

43% attended 10 or more  
22% attended between 5 and 9  
24% attended between 2 and 4  
10% first-time attendees

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND AND CURRENT LEVEL OF CHURCH PARTICIPATION

48% LDS, active participant  
16% LDS, semi-active participant  
25% LDS less- or non-participating  
5% former LDS, actively participating to extent they can  
7% former LDS, no longer interested in participation in LDS church life

BELIEF IN LDS DOCTRINE, SCRIPTURE, AND CURRENT CHURCH POLITY

Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 their level of agreement with five statements, 10 equalling a very high level of belief.

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world.*

63% 8-10  
20% 4-7  
16% 1-3

*I believe Joseph Smith is a prophet of God through whom the Gospel of Jesus Christ and essential teachings, priesthood keys, and ordinances were restored.*

41% 8-10  
78% 4-7  
31% 1-3

*I believe the Book of Mormon is essentially a faithful translation of an ancient record.*

33% 8-10  
26% 4-7  
41% 1-3

*I believe in the essential correctness of LDS teachings about the "plan of salvation."*

38% 8-10  
35% 4-7  
27% 1-3

*I believe today's prophets, apostles, and other general leaders continue to receive specific divine revelation and are leading the Church as God would have them do.*

26% 8-10  
34% 4-7  
40% 1-3

INTEREST LEVEL IN SYMPOSIUM TOPICS AND OPPORTUNITIES

*Contemporary LDS issues*  
80% High 19% Medium 1% Low

*Mormon history*  
77% High 18% Medium 5% Low

*Chance to meet friends and others interested in LDS experience and scholarship*  
64% High 24% Medium 12% Low

*LDS doctrine, theology, philosophy*  
55% High 33% Medium 13% Low

*Social, political, and general religious issues, even if not specifically tied to Mormonism*  
37% High 47% Medium 16% Low

*Book of Mormon and other LDS scripture*  
33% High 46% Medium 21% Low

*Humor sessions*  
33% High 46% Medium 21% Low

*Films or plays*  
21% High 40% Medium 38% Low

*Literature and art*  
20% High 35% Medium 45% Low

OTHER TOPICS OR SESSION TYPES RESPONDENTS ENJOY OR WOULD LIKE TO SEE DISCUSSED MORE AT SUNSTONE

"Need more on service opportunities"  
"More sociology and psychology"  
"Roundtables for topic sharing"  
"Successes rather than failures in Church programs"  
"AIDS and orphans"  
"Science versus creationism"  
"Having respondents from the Church would surely be interesting on some topics."

WHAT TOPICS SEEM TO BE OVERDONE?

"Book of Mormon historicity"  
"Gays and lesbians"

"Women's issues"  
"Retrospectives on Sunstone and Dialogue"  
"Hearing from 'the Club' of excommunicants. I'm tired of their griping."

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING SYMPOSIUMS

"More audience participation. Speakers should speak from outlines. Too many papers read word for word."  
"Find ways to promote the symposium with the youth."  
"More group hymn singing"  
"My experience confirmed that the Mormon History Association is more balanced and of greater interest in topics. It covers all sects connected with the restoration and doesn't pander to apostate 'Utah' church types."

**A**H, home! Can you imagine a more interesting dinner table than one with all of these family members? It's clear some of us will enjoy the meals in this issue more than others. But can (or should) it be any other way? *Bon appetite!* ☺

NOTES

1. These results are very close to the age demographics gathered from the 187 responses returned in our October 2002 SUNSTONE reader survey. However, a few more readers were in the age 45-54 category (16%).

2. These results correlate closely with data gathered in a 1999 survey of Sunstone attendees. Of the 314 people who returned surveys, 54.5% had done post-graduate work, and 34% again reported they had bachelor's degrees.

3. These statistics differ from Sunstone's overall geographical demographics. Active "Sunstoners" (defined as current subscribers, donors, and regular attendees at either the Salt Lake or one of Sunstone's several regional symposiums) are geographically distributed as follows: 40.2% live in Utah; 34.5% live in the western U.S.; 24.1% in the eastern U.S.; 1.2% live abroad.



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