



CORNUCOPIA

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Righteous Dominion

JESUS IN THE WARD

COLUMN EDITOR'S NOTE: *We are honoring the request of the writer of the following story to remain anonymous. Please continue to send in your stories of leaders and others who are true exemplars of the love of Christ. Email your stories to: <StewartSLC@aol.com>*

—ALAN AND VICKIE EASTMAN

WHEN I WAS CALLED AS BISHOP OF A YOUNG single adults ward, I knew I would face many challenges, and some might be unusual. But I never anticipated that one would be having Jesus Christ in my ward. Before you think I am being sacrilegious, read on.

Bob (I'll call him that) had been attending our ward for quite some time. A school friend had brought him to our meetings. He was very interested in the Church and seemed very earnest and sincere.

The elders assigned to our ward had been teaching him and announced one week that he was ready to be baptized. We already had a baptism scheduled, so he was interviewed and added to the baptism program. At the service, we had the good feelings that usually go with witnessing adult conversions.

The next Sunday, a fast Sunday, Bob and the other convert were confirmed as Church members in sacrament meeting. Later, the first one to come to the pulpit to bear his testimony was Bob.

He began by expressing how much the gospel meant to him. Because his feelings ran deep, and he thought a great deal about things, he was taking a considerable amount of time. I was becoming a little concerned that he might be one of those people whose testimonies tend to go on and on. Then I started having difficulty figuring out what he meant by what he was saying. What he was saying did not seem to fit with what a new convert would normally say in his testimony. He began to sound as if he were talking about *His* gospel.

He then announced that he was our elder brother, Jesus Christ.

A young man in the front row immediately stood up and, with evident displeasure, walked out.

As Bob added his hope that all of us in the ward would be able to pray about the matter and receive confirmation of his divinity, I turned to a member of the stake presidency next to

me and said, "I guess it's time for me to do something."

I stood up, put an arm around Bob, and said we loved him, that he was indeed our brother, but that we knew he was not our elder brother Jesus Christ.

He calmly left the pulpit and sat down.

The meeting continued, with several members of the ward giving testimony of their knowledge of the real Jesus Christ. Despite, or perhaps because of its beginning, this turned into a very spiritual testimony meeting. Afterward, I asked Bob to come to my office to talk.

I once again expressed to him my testimony that he was not Jesus Christ, and as I listened, he again, calmly, quietly testified that he was. Never having faced this situation before, I was hard-pressed to know what to do. I reiterated to Bob how much we loved him and wanted him to associate with us, but I might have to convene a disciplinary court to excommunicate him, because I just couldn't imagine how we could have a mortal member of Jesus Christ's church who claimed to be Jesus Christ himself. But I said I would seek the stake president's counsel and then talk to Bob next Sunday. He took it all very calmly, I suppose because he was pretty sure that in the meantime, the truth would be revealed to me.

As I had left the chapel after the testimony meeting, I had noticed that some of the women in the ward seemed to be upset to the point of tears about Bob's declaration, so after I finished my meeting with Bob, I decided to go to Relief Society to talk about what happened.

I talked about how chemical imbalances in the brain can sometimes lead to mental illness and delusions and that a common delusion among sufferers is for them to believe they are famous people, such as Jesus Christ. One of the sisters responded that she had a relative who had experienced this, and another sister volunteered that she at one time had similar mental difficulties and, for a period of time, had thought she, herself, was Jesus Christ.

I urged the sisters to not reject Bob, but as their own strength allowed, to show we loved him as our brother, but not as Jesus Christ.

I reached the stake president just as fast as I could. Fortunately he had much more wisdom than I. We discussed the situation at length and consulted the *Handbook of Instructions*. Nothing in the *Handbook* said people should be excommunicated just for their beliefs. A disciplinary court should only be considered if a person persisted in proclaiming doctrines contrary to the basic doctrines of the Church (this certainly seemed to qualify as a basic doctrine).

So, the next Sunday, I told Bob that we would have no problem with his continued participation in the ward if he

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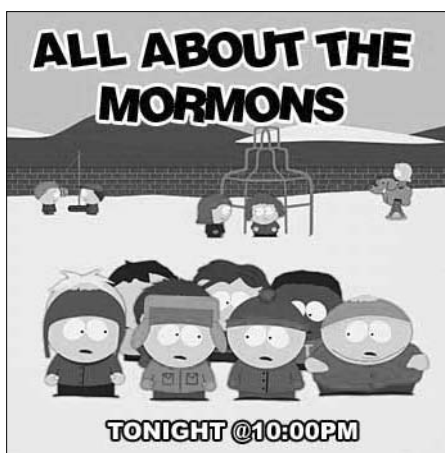
THE MORMONS COME TO SOUTH PARK

THE INCIDENT IN WHICH MARTIN HARRIS LOST 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript was dramatized—and satirized—in a recent episode of Comedy Central's coarse animated series, *South Park*. When an LDS boy, Gary Harrison, and his family move into Stan Marsh's neighborhood, the Marshes (along with the TV audience) get a crash course in Mormon origins with the help of flashbacks to 1820s Palmyra. After initially being impressed by Gary and his family—think of the most *special* Mormon family you've ever met, then quadruple the specialness—Stan becomes incredulous about LDS beliefs. Seer stones in a hat, golden plates that only Joseph Smith could see, 116 lost pages that couldn't be reproduced—how dumb must Mormons be, Stan won-

ders, not to realize that Joseph Smith was a fraud?

Still, the Mormons get the last word. "Maybe Joseph Smith made it all up," Gary tells Stan. "But I have a great life and a great family, and I have the Book of Mormon to thank for it. . . . You're so high and mighty, you couldn't look past my religion and just be my friend. You've got a lot of growing up to do, buddy."

This is Joseph Smith's second appearance on *South Park*. In an earlier episode, he joined forces with other world religious figures, including Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and Krishna, to battle the rise of a new cult (see SUNSTONE, Nov. 2001, 17). *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone are also responsible for the film *Orgazmo*, about a Mormon missionary turned crime-fighting porn star.



Above (l to r): Butters, Kyle, Stan, and Cartman, regular characters from *South Park*; Right: Martin Harris records Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon as Joseph gazes into his hat; Right inset: Moroni visits Joseph Smith, declaring "I am a Native American."



would follow certain ground rules. I asked him not to discuss his belief that he was Jesus Christ in any of the ward meetings nor with individuals at church. I acknowledged his sincere belief that he was Jesus Christ and said if someone directly asked him, he did not need to deny his beliefs. I further asked him not to offer his testimony in fast and testimony meeting. He amiably agreed.

IF JESUS CHRIST were to appear as a young man in our day, I believe he would look and act much like Bob. Bob's facial hair made him look much as artists through the centuries have portrayed Jesus as a young man. Bob's demeanor also fit. He was

unfailingly calm, meek, thoughtful, considerate of others, and very sincere.

In the ensuing months, Bob and I had many discussions. I tried every intellectual and spiritual argument I could think of to convince him that his belief was a delusion based on a chemical imbalance. Bob frankly told me that he was in counseling for mental difficulties and had some time ago stopped taking his medications. I encouraged him to resume taking his medications. But he continued to bear testimony that he was Jesus Christ, and that eventually I, and others, including President Hinckley, would receive answer to prayer that he, Bob, was in fact Jesus Christ.

Despite our differences over his beliefs, Bob and I developed a great respect for each other. I greatly respected him, his personal qualities, and, yes, even his persistence in what he sincerely believed to be true. In turn, Bob respected my treatment of him in our discussions and respected me as the bishop of the ward.

Ward members related to Bob in various ways. Some embraced him and encouraged him and let him know we loved him. Some were able only to just be friendly to him. A few who were more shaken by the events were able only to ignore him. But I did not know of anyone who rejected him as a person.

One fast Sunday morning many months later, Bob came to me just before the sacrament meeting and said that he would like to bear his testimony that day. He looked different, clean-shaven and especially happy. I suggested that he not bear his testimony that day, but that we talk right after the meeting.

When he came to my office, he explained that earlier that week, he had realized he was not Jesus Christ. He explained how he had come to that conclusion and said he had very carefully recorded all of his thoughts in his diary, so that if he were confused again, he could read how he had come to the truth. We agreed that I would briefly announce in priesthood meeting that day that Bob had asked me to tell the Elder's quorum members that he now knew the truth that he was not Jesus Christ. I told him that he could bear his testimony the next fast Sunday if all was still well.

COMPARE BOB'S EXPERIENCE with that of another young man whom I will call Bill.

Bill was new in our ward and made an appointment with me to clear up some things in his life. He had recently moved into the area and met an active LDS young lady whom he wanted to marry. He explained that he had been inactive for a long time but wanted now to come back to the Church. He told me what had happened to him just before he moved to our area. He had decided to leave his past behind and become active again. He had gone to a young singles ward in that area. After he'd attended for a few weeks, the bishop had asked to see him. He

All-Seeing Eye

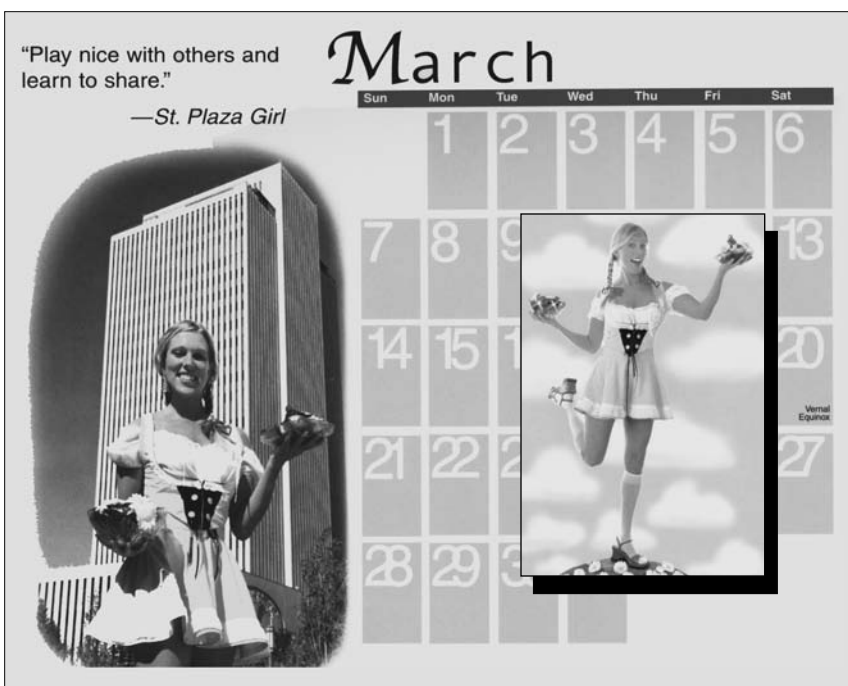
JELL-O DIPLOMACY

A NEW CALENDAR UNVEILED IN SALT LAKE FOR THE YEAR 2004 strives to bring unity to a community divided over the Main Street Plaza controversy. Dubbed the "St. Plaza Girl" (modeled after the St. Provo Girl, the mascot of locally brewed St. Provo beer), Heidi offers a variety of inspirational quotes each month while modeling in or near the plaza holding various servings of green Jell-O.

"Mistakes are fat free," and "Better than Prozac!" are just a couple of Heidi's reasons why gelatin might be the answer for bringing the divided community back together. "Green Jell-O . . . is a recipe for love. So let's put this darn Main Street thing behind us with a big helping of love. I like mine with whipped cream, though I hear shaved carrots also work."

When the St. Plaza Girl asks, "Can't we Utahns all just get along?" The reply is an enthusiastic, "Heck, yeah!"

Published by White Horse Books, the calendar is available for \$10.99 and may be ordered at <www.utahwhitehorsebooks.com>.



had been thrilled, thinking the bishop wanted to get to know him better. Instead, the bishop asked him to stop attending the ward. Bill told me that his hair and clothing at the time still reflected his past. The bishop told him that the members of the ward felt very uncomfortable in his presence and that he was therefore asking Bill to leave and not come back.

I WAS VERY pleased, some time after I had been released as bishop, to learn in stake conference that both Bob and Bill were to be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Lighter Minds

ARTICLES OF REGULATION

Joseph Smith penned the Thirteen Articles of Faith as statements of basic Latter-day Saint beliefs. But do they truly guide Mormon life and thinking today? Not according to a group of friends, including J. Jacob Sorensen (his official General Authority-sounding name), of Sandy, Utah, who in 1999, began listening for “Articles of Regulation,” the meta-messages that seem to guide modern Latter-day Saints as much, or even more, than the Prophet’s list. The Articles are continually evolving. Please send your suggestions to SUNSTONE, and we’ll pass them along to the compilers (and maybe even print a revised list in the future).

- First We believe that the most difficult and complex questions can be answered with a mindless cliché.
- Second We believe that the main ordinance of the gospel is home/visiting teaching.
- Third We believe that any personal experience can be adapted to fit the lesson.
- Fourth We believe in redundancy. The only way the Saints will ever live a gospel principle is to have a lesson on it over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over again. (Or “The Lord hasn’t revealed more to us because we haven’t mastered the basics yet” rule.)
- Fifth We believe in being orthodox. Saints should think within the box. Truths of the gospel cannot be learned if new things are brought up. (Or “The smallest box wins” rule.)

- Sixth We believe that humankind will be saved by ignorance. (The “What does this have to do with my salvation?” rule.)
- Seventh We believe that reading the scriptures, praying, attending church, and obeying the commandments will solve any problem a person has. (The “Your experience doesn’t fit correlation parameters, so it doesn’t really exist” principle.)
- Eighth No matter what the facts reveal, we believe they support our position and strengthen our testimony. (The “We may be wrong, but we’re never in doubt” rule.)
- Ninth We believe that everything that happens to us in life is part of God’s special plan just for us. It was supposed to happen, and it is a blessing.
- Tenth We believe that whatever the topic for this week’s priesthood lesson, it is the second most important principle of the gospel.
- Eleventh We believe than any comment made during a lesson, no matter how stupid or irrelevant, if it’s said with enough emotion, is of profound importance. (The “If you don’t have something to say, say something anyway” rule.)
- Twelfth We believe we should obey our leaders without questioning the wisdom of their instructions. (The “Even though we don’t believe in infallibility, our leaders can’t be wrong” principle.)
- Thirteenth We believe that people who have never experienced particular problems understand them much better than people who have.

Mormon Media Image II

PLAYING THE POLYGAMY CARD

ALTHOUGH BRYAN FELLOWS IS A POPULAR RECURRING *Saturday Night Live* character (portrayed by cast member Tracey Morgan), his lesser-known brother, Ryan Fellows, did not appear until the 6 December episode of the skit, “Bryan Fellows Safari Planet.” The Reverend (and U.S. presidential candidate) Al Sharpton hosted the show and played the part of Ryan Fellows.

The skit’s running gag is that although the show is about introducing viewers to members of the animal kingdom, Bryan is not an accredited zoologist (he is a high school drop-out, however) and is paranoid around the animals, often having visions of the visiting creatures attacking him or, in one instance, giving him a bad haircut.

In the episode with Sharpton, Bryan and Ryan are visited by a seal. When the animal’s keeper says that seals usually gather in groups of one male and thirty females, Sharpton’s character exclaims, “Are you saying that seal is a Mormon?”

Though LDS Public Affairs often challenges media references to Mormon polygamists, there has been no official statement to date regarding the seal’s alleged membership in the Church. Nor have officials commented on the likelihood that Sharpton will win the Mormon vote.



Bryan Fellows (left, played by Tracey Morgan) gestures to his brother Ryan (played by the Reverend Al Sharpton)

Twenty Years Ago In Sunstone

The following reflection by then-regular SUNSTONE columnist Michael Hicks is excerpted from his "Aesthetics and Noetics" essay in the November/December 1983 issue.

ART TASTES OF RIGHT IN A WORLD THAT IS essentially wrong. It speaks of health in a world essentially sick. And—here many fail to understand—it speaks of strength in a world essentially weak. Art, strong art, is potent to the degree that it may disarm or momentarily injure us in our weakness. For this reason, we sometimes fight art that is difficult. Like the wrestling angel, it wounds as it blesses.

The danger of religious art is the danger of religion itself. Rather than a force for right, health, and strength, it can and usually does become a mere salve for their opposites—wrong, sickness, weakness. That religion saves best, I think, that provokes us and challenges us. (Joseph made the telling remark that every divine communication will tell us things we never thought of before. The unthought-of, to turn his remark around, is a sign of truth.) Yet religion remains for most people an opiate—or, to hold to our terms, an anaesthetic. And most religious art deadens feeling by repetition, numbs by a litany of formulae, or puts to sleep by a surfeit of effects. The truly aesthetic, to the contrary, awakens feeling by variation, order, clarity. Thus any art should be above all a piece of artifice. Like language, it is a contrivance, one that informs the mind (read "spirit") by arousing physical sensations that correspond to ideas. Its logic may not be the logic of you or me, but that is how it teaches.


The aesthetic in religion and in art should not really lift us out of the body, but drive us, rejoicing, back into it. We should be, as the philosopher put it, "no longer swimming, floating, but walking and dancing."

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POTENTIAL BOISE, IDAHO, STUDY GROUP FORMING

As the Sunstone contact person for Idaho, I have received a few inquiries about potential events for the Boise area. As it seems that there might be enough people interested in organizing a group (and I am using the term loosely), I am asking interested persons to meet at my apartment on Thursday, 12 February 2004, at 7 p.m. This meeting will be to discuss the plausibility of organizing events around LDS topics. This will be the time to decide which direction, if any, we want to go, such as: scripture study, hosting speakers, book club, potluck dinners, etc.

Area readers please respond to me whether you would like to participate and give some ideas about the direction we should take. I look forward to meeting you all!

The meeting will be held at 2227 Stephen Ave, #102 in Boise, just off of Park Center and Pennsylvania. Feel free to email or phone if you have more questions or need directions: <dylanjmcdonald@hotmail.com>, (208) 381-0735

DYLAN MCDONALD

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