CORNUCOPIA

SUNSTONE invites short musings: chatty reports, cultural trend sightings, theological meditations. All lovely things of good report, please share them. Send to: <editor@sunstoneonline.com>

Righteous Dominion

COLUMN EDITOR'S NOTE: *Please continue to send your stories of leaders and others who are true exemplars of the love of Christ, who have touched your life through their flexibility or their understanding that people are more important than programs. Email your stories to: <StewartSLC@aol.com>*

—ALAN AND VICKIE EASTMAN

A BISHOP IN SNEAKERS

ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO, I MOVED FROM PROVO to Seattle, Washington, for graduate school. My church experiences in Provo had been difficult. I'm a member of the "Borderlands," to use the term D. Jeff Burton coined for his SUNSTONE column, and I'd felt a bit isolated in Provo. I eagerly hoped to move into a ward where I could feel a sense of spiritual and social community.

The first hint that my new ward would be different from my Provo ward was when the bishop's son came to help us move in and mentioned that he was planning to study theology in graduate school. This impression was strengthened on my first Sunday when I noticed that every member of the bishopric had facial hair! I later learned that it was a running joke in the ward: any man who wanted a leadership position should grow a beard.

A few weeks later, during an emotionally difficult time, I left sacrament meeting a few minutes early in tears. A sister had chosen to speak about priesthood and had given an exceptionally authoritarian talk. She insisted that obedience to the priesthood included dutifully submitting to all requests by all priesthood holders, even when that request was as mundane as a husband's food preferences. In Utah, I just shrugged such talks off, but I had come with hope that things might be different here. That night, the bishop called, asking to meet with me. With trepidation, I drove to his home that evening, wondering if his call that night were merely a coincidence. When I walked into his study, he asked how I was doing and said he noticed I had left sacrament meeting early. He paused for a few moments. I said nothing, either. Then he spoke, softly, contemplatively. He said that he had considered stepping up to the stand after this sister's talk to disagree with her, but he felt that people should be allowed to speak their minds, even if not everyone agreed. At first, I couldn't believe my ears. The bishop didn't hold that men alone had all the authority? The bishop thought that we should be allowed to express dissent? Either one was a bombshell, but together the statements were nothing short of miraculous!

A few months later, I was invited to join a small discussion group that met once a month at the bishop's home. The subject, not too unusual, was a New Testament commentary. The unusual part is that this particular commentary had been written by Friedrich Weinreb, a Ph.D. economist imbued in the ancient Jewish tradition, and that the reading was my bishop's own translation from the original German. I looked forward to that monthly meeting, where we discussed points from the commentary and how it related to the Mormon perspective.

This bishop admitted that he and other leaders were not always inspired and could make mistakes. He has published articles in *Dialogue,* and I've heard him disagree, privately, with men above him in the Church's hierarchy. He reminded me that I was not the only one in the Church or even in our ward who sometimes found certain doctrinal and cultural issues troublesome. For the first time in my life, I felt I had a bishop in whom I could confide without carefully measuring my words.

Sometimes I find it frustrating that I clutch small signs of nonconformity with such fervor. Honestly, what does it really matter if I've seen the bishop come to church wearing white sneakers colorfully emblazoned with the names of all the Primary children, or if he joked one Sunday that he expected me to be with a six-pack down at the lake watching boat races instead of sitting decorously in Relief Society? For whatever reason, this bishop's individuality and humor set up an environment that encouraged spiritual growth for me, and, I believe, for most of the ward.

The time of my move to Seattle coincided with a personal crisis of faith. Because of my frustrations with institutional practices, I had allowed my personal relationship with God to languish. I will forever be grateful to this bishop whose kind and wise leadership allowed me time and space to foster my testimony of core gospel principles. I now feel my beliefs are strong enough that I can actively create a nurturing spiritual environment instead of being entirely shaped by my surroundings. Without the church experience shaped in large part by this bishop, I'm not sure if I would have found that strength.

This man is no longer the bishop, and I'm not sure I'll ever have another ecclesiastical leader quite like him. But I'm com-

All-seeing Eye

CAPTAIN MORONI TO GADIANTON 4

FIRST THERE WAS THE BOOK OF MORMON MOVIE. NOW LDS entrepreneurs have brought us the Book of Mormon chess set. The ancient battle between good and evil can be reenacted on your living room table—and with the right moves, maybe this time the Nephites will win.

One set, distributed by Covenant Communications for $99.95, features red-clad Nephites under the command of Father Lehi, who, with the Liahona in his hands and wearing a Tree of Life apron (right), takes the role of the white king. Sariah, his wife is queen. Eight stripling warriors—having become white and delightsome—serve as the red team's pawns. Nephi and Moroni bearing golden plates fill in as bishops; Helaman and Captain Moroni are knights. The green (black) team is led by Laman, of course, who is ably assisted by bishops Gadianton and Kishkumen (far right), and an array of other evil-doers.

If you think Covenant's set is expensive, consider the set marketed by Latter Day Designs. It sells the same concept, with pieces of 24-carat gold and pewter, for $500. How rare a possession indeed! No word on whether the pieces will retain their brightness.

forted to know that he's continuing to shape the church's future—his last act as bishop was to arrange to have himself called as a worker in the Primary nursery, where he has remained for the past two years.

SARAH RAY ALLRED
Seattle, Washington

Blogwatch

ON SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

The following reflection by Kristine Haglund Harris was posted 12 November 2004 to the LDS blog Times and Seasons <www.timesandseasons.org> and is reprinted by permission.

TEN MINUTES OR SO AFTER MY FIRST POSITIVE pregnancy test, I was at the bookstore, perusing the shelves of parenting titles, a pastime I've continued with some regularity for nearly a decade now. One of my favorite of these books is called *10 Principles of Spiritual Parenting*, by Mimi Doe and Marsha F. Walch (HarperCollins, 1998). It's a little too New Agey for me; I can't quite bring myself to do guided meditations with my children. But what I really like in the book is the perspective that spirituality is innately present in children—that it is something to be cultivated, rather than instilled.

In Primary and in much of the Mormon approach to teaching children, I find a different underlying assumption—that children need to be taught what to believe and how to be spiritual. We pay lip service to the idea that children have access to the light of Christ and spiritual gifts—unfortunately, this often comes in the form of sentimental imaginings about what infants would tell us, if only they could speak. But most of our time and energy in Primary is devoted to getting children to be quiet and listen to *us*, so we can teach them. And our teaching is directed almost entirely to the children's "intel-

Parents in Zion

TRAIN UP A CHILD . . .

YOU'VE BLESSED YOUR infant son to grow up to be worthy of priesthood responsibilties, so why not have him start dressing the part? After all, in just eleven short years, he'll be a deacon!

These "Tiny-Ties Onesies," white (of course!) and with five different embroidered neck ties to choose from, are available from LDSliving.com in three sizes, from infant through eighteen months.

lect"; we talk and talk and talk at them, and we believe that they understand spiritual concepts if they can talk about them.

We love to watch them perform in Primary programs, which often consist of their repeating words they can barely understand, reading parts their parents and teachers wrote for them. Even the beloved anthem of Mormon childhood, "I Am a Child of God," is completely beyond the understanding of most of the children who sing it. (I can't be the only person who ever thought the words were "Teach me all that I'm a stew" or "And so my knees are great.") It's a great song to learn, but I think it's hard to truly appreciate the doctrine it teaches until well after Primary graduation. The correlated Primary curriculum seems driven by a strong desire to "cover" as many important doctrinal points as possible, as early as possible. This is a noble impulse, but I fear that our eagerness to cram content into our children sometimes overrides our respect for the natural curve of their development.

There is almost no room in our approach for quiet, unarticulated wonder or gratitude. We are always in such a hurry to attach words—our words—to our children's feelings. The result, too often, is the ghastly spectacle of the five-year-old bearing "his" testimony with his mother whispering in his ear: "I love my mom and dad; I know the Church is true; I know that Gordon B. Hinckley is a prophet; inthenameof-JesusChristamen." Cute, maybe; good practice, possibly. But really, really unlikely to reflect the child's authentic spiritual feelings. Worst of all, I think that teaching children to parrot adult understandings, praising them for singing and saying the words we most want to hear, can sometimes deaden their capacity for genuine spiritual experience. If we teach them too soon to think and talk in adult terms about what they sense and feel, they will more and more have only those experiences we have told them are acceptable. If our children's heads are too full of the sound of *our* voices explaining doctrine to them, will they still be able to hear the voice of God as they grow? If we spend their Primary years teaching them rules and formulas for talking about the Spirit, will they still be able to describe their *own* sense of the Spirit that "blows where it listeth" when we finally turn them loose to gain their own testimonies as teenagers.

As always in the high-wire act of bringing up children, parents and teachers must achieve a delicate balance—if we don't teach our children anything, they have no framework in which to understand their deepest spiritual experiences. I wouldn't turn a kid of mine loose to express herself on the violin without plenty of instruction in basic technique and some hours logged practicing scales. But I think in some ways, we do things exactly backwards in our teaching of children. We'd be better off to tell the younger children more stories from the scriptures without always explicitly telling them what the moral of the story is; we should sing more songs about flowers and Jesus and fewer about pre-mortal existence and the Atonement. Then when they're teenagers, they would have more spiritual experiences to which they'd just need to attach words and concepts, instead of having to try so hard to produce the kinds of spiritual experiences we've taught them they're supposed to have.

KRISTINE HAGLUND HARRIS
Swampscott, Massachusetts

In the Belly of the Whale

"THOU SHALT NOT . . . BECAUSE THOU ART MORMON"

In this column, "In the Belly of the Whale," Todd Robert Petersen investigates Mormon culture, art, and politics from the perspective of a baptized outsider. Todd is a writer and humorist who teaches at Southern Utah University and is an editor-at-large for The Sugar Beet, *a satirical publication of Mormon news and culture. This is the third column in the series.*

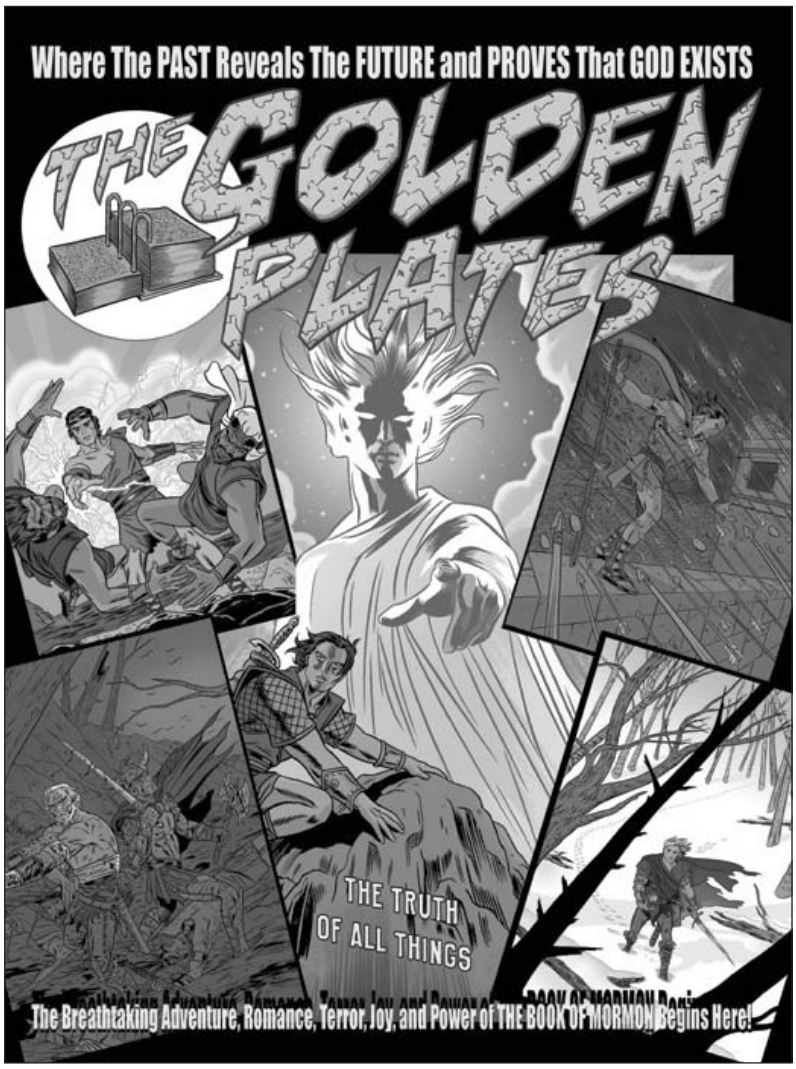
Media Watch

BUFF SUPERHEROES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

HAVE YOU EVER WISHED NEPHI were a superhero? Now he is, sort of, as Mike Allred, a world-renowned comic book artist and Latter-day Saint, has launched his latest project, *The Golden Plates: The Book of Mormon in Pictures and Words. The Golden Plates* is a twelve-volume set that will be released over the next several years. Volume One, covering First Nephi 1–14, is just out.

The images are original but strive for familiarity, as they clearly evoke classic paintings most Mormons know. Thus, in Allred's renderings of Nephi rebuking his brothers, Samuel preaching from the city walls, and Mormon mourning a lost nation, the costumes and settings follow rather closely Friberg's famous paintings (see illustration at right).

"Think *It's A Wonderful Life* meets *Conan the Barbarian*!" says Allred, according to a story posted at NewsARama.com. "There's no other book that is so rich with adventure, action, romance, courage, beauty, and spiritual enlightenment; at least, none that I'm aware of. At the very least, it's a phenomenal story rich with visual power. So, if I pull it off, it'll be the most significant thing I'll ever be a part of."



In Mike Allred's art, Arnold Friberg meets Arnold Schwarzenegger.

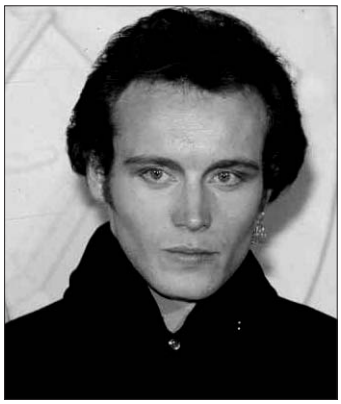
IT'S NOT LIKE ME TO BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD, because (a) I don't like it, and (b) I spend so much time in a state of ready outrage that I'm hypersensitive to just about everything. This is necessary equipment for a satirist (and a liberal), like the olfactory bulbs of a turkey vulture. A brother has to be ready to sniff out folly before he's been scooped—nothing smells worse than an old joke somebody thinks is fresh. If you're out of the loop for even a month, you're dead meat. Jokes, like egg salad, have a short shelf life.

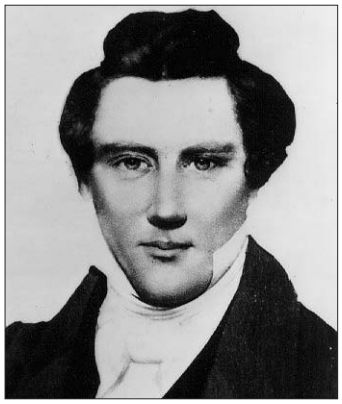
Now that I'm a columnist with the duty to keep up with my Mormon kitsch, I feel an extra responsibility to stay abreast of Zion in her outrageous garb. So, you can imagine how upset I was to discover something had passed completely under my radar.

After a brain-addling fall semester and an exhausting battery of finals, I rose from my chair, nodded to my Silver Surfer figurine, and headed upstairs to con my buddy Kyle into sneaking away for a Coke. In the hall, I found a girl sitting cross-legged on one of the couches in the English department. She was reading Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* with the kind of intensity most students reserve for more important things like changing the ring tones on their cell phones. She turned the

All-seeing Eye

THE ADAM-JOSEPH THEORY?





WHILE WATCHING A RECENT documentary on former New Wave rocker Adam Ant, Connell O'Donovan spotted this picture of Adam (far left) and thought for a second that it was Joseph Smith. So he went online and found this daguerreotype believed by many to be an image of Joseph (left), which is strikingly similar, even down to some of the clothing. Spooky?

Adding to the intrigue, Adam's most famous lyric: "You don't drink, you don't smoke—what *do* you do?"

page, stuck the tip of one of her braids between her lips, and lowered the book. Pasted across her chest in white sans-serif type against a field of the chastest, most adolescent pink you could imagine was the simple message: "I can't . . . I'm Mormon."

As cool as I prefer to think of myself (I was hip to *Napoleon Dynamite* when it was a short film called *Peluca*), I hadn't heard a thing about these shirts or the kerfuffle they had caused at BYU (outraged students, swift ejection of an ad from the student paper), not one flipping word. In fact, this very nice, very studious girl in moderately stylish clothes was the first person I'd ever seen wearing anything that signified that they were Mormon besides a missionary name tag or BYU *Cougars*-garb.

"I can't . . . I'm Mormon" was not a new sentiment to me; that's not what alarmed me. I'd heard this kind of thing bandied about in university wards about eighteen million times until I was forced by my age and my pending marriage to begin attending a family ward with my then-future in-laws. Even once I was married and started going to church with little kids and old people, I heard so many versions of this ethic you'd think someone had added it to the Doctrine and Covenants. Some guy turned down a drink at a business meeting, and the boss thought he had real character, so he made him a partner. Some girl walked out on a filthy DVD being played at a slumber party, and her home teacher, while giving her a ride home, would tell her that she wasn't a panty-waist but a Mormon Joan of Arc driving unwholesomeness from the ward. Whatever the story, it seemed like people's sense of Mormon-ness was negatively defined. *We are what we reject*. Every Mormon knows that, especially converts.

It's a safe bet that a T-shirt like this doesn't exist because somebody thought a nice girl reading Thackeray at Southern Utah University needed a reminder of her duties to reject Babylon. A shirt like this gets made because somebody thinks that (a) people say that kind of thing a lot, and (b) it's nuts to do so. So, when somebody makes a shirt like this for these reasons, they must on some level refute the idea that being Mormon is the shield. My problem with the whole thing was that I couldn't get my head around why this particular girl on this particular bench was wearing this particular T-shirt. Did she think that "we are what we reject," or did she think the slogan was a silly thing to say?

A week later, after some digging around, I discovered that BYU's offense at the shirt had to do with the intimation that our religion is the only thing that keeps us from drinking booze or coffee or from sleeping around, or watching/downloading/reading pornography. I'm not offended by this notion; I'm ambivalent about it. I usually want to embrace anything that offends someone at BYU, but with this T-shirt, it became abundantly clear to me that offense was much too simple a response for BYU, or for me, because if conference talks are any evidence, our religion *doesn't* really make us moral.

Case in point: Some friends of mine have adopted two lovely girls from unwed mothers through LDS family services. We were chatting over Christmas break, and I bounced around the idea that our religion doesn't guarantee that we'll be moral. My friend Jeff laughed and said, "Both of our birth mothers are LDS." To make matters more complex, he lifted his three-month-old and pedestalled her on one hand and said, "I'm sort of glad they did fool around—is that a terrible thing to say?"

THE LONGER I stood in that hallway, staring at that pink T-shirt, the more I questioned myself and my people. The notion that simply being Mormon is enough to save us never made sense to me. Any bishop in this world knows that being Mormon isn't enough. If it were, he'd have a lot more free time on his hands. So clearly I was missing the joke, but I felt as if I were at the still point of the moving world, having an epiphany handed to me on a pink platter. The epiphany was this: the world knows what we *don't* do, but do they know what we *do* do? Given that there are just about twelve million of us on this planet, what makes a Mormon a Mormon? I guess we can kind of rely on some assent to the Articles of Faith, but those statements are abstract and vague in a way, and they don't do all that much to clarify who we are at work and on the freeway.

The problem with defining Mormons by what we reject is that some Mormons do, in fact, drink, and some Mormons cook meth, and some Mormons traffic in child pornography, and some Mormons are crooked businessmen, and some Mormons don't hometeach, and some Mormons don't prepare their lessons, and some Mormons don't fast on fast Sundays, and some Mormons don't look out for their neighbors' best interests. On the other hand, some Mormons don't *trick* people into hearing the missionary discussions on a non-stop flight from Chicago to Salt Lake. Some Mormons listen to Elvis Costello, some Mormons read Samuel Beckett and hate Jell-O and can't stand funeral potatoes and gag at the thought of even a sip of pineapple sherbet punch. Some Mormons actually vote Democrat, and some don't believe in the IRS or in a currency that isn't backed by a gold or silver standard. Some Mormons want only one or two kids, and some Mormons recycle. Some Mormons don't care for the Del Parsons red-robed Jesus—they much prefer the Minerva Teichert.

Lots of Mormons do lots of things, and lots don't. The more I thought about it, the less I could actually point to and say, "This is what Mormons do; this is what we all have in common." At a basic level, we have Jesus (but so do lots of Christians), Joseph Smith (but so do the splinter groups), and the Book of Mormon (ditto the splinter groups). We do have some common history but not much. A friend who was a professor of veterinary medicine in what was then southern Rhodesia once told me that the African Saints didn't have the same reverence for the pioneers that American Saints do. The Africans don't have much experience with snow, and they walk everywhere—so, what's the big deal?

The more I thought about it, the less I felt there was something out there that Mormons either do or don't do.

WHAT BEGAN AS simple outrage at some well-intended Mormon kitsch ended up being a pretty heavy ontological moment for me. All of this bubbled through my head as I stood there staring, but there was nothing for me to do with it. These thoughts were just a rant, perhaps even an elaborate excuse for leering at a nice-looking girl. In fact, I sort of wish that had been the major issue for me. That way it wouldn't have been too much of a stretch to start shifting this essay to explore how Mormons don't leer at the chests of people almost half their age. Even if I wasn't physically leering, I was leering *philosophically*, but is that any better?

When you get down to it, what I wish had happened is this: The girl, coming to the end of her novel, closes the book and thinks for a moment about Becky Sharpe until she sees me there, staring at her. She holds the book (the movie version) to her chest, Reese Witherspoon's come-hither look making my eyes go straight to the ceiling. I blush, naturally, and then point to her chest, which is now book-covered. I stammer, "Your shirt-I was-just-um-you-know-it's really kind of funny . . . if you think about it." She storms off, not sure if I am a fool or a pervert or both. I either sulk or throw my hands in the air and feel like a silly, middle-aged dunderhead for a few days. An ending like that would have had thematic power, would have allowed me to create some real ironic distance, to implicate myself in my narrative, like David Foster Wallace or Charlie Kauffman, and put myself on trial as a writer and a man.

But nothing so dramatic happened.

Instead, my thoughts and confusion faded, and I turned from the girl and headed upstairs, where I wedged myself into the doorway of Kyle's office and said, "You seen the T-shirt that goes *I can't . . . I'm Mormon*?"

Without looking up, he clicked his mouse and said, "Yeah, there was some brouhaha up at BYU a while ago. For crying out loud, it's a T-shirt, not a Rodin."

"You want to go get a Coke?" I asked, feeling a day late and a dollar short.

Kyle grinned. "I can't," he said. "I'm Mormon."

TODD ROBERT PETERSEN
Cedar City, Utah

APOLOGY

An October 2004 SUNSTONE Cornucopia item, "Blogwatch: Eternal Jeopardy," an excerpt from an interview all-time Jeopardy! *champion Ken Jennings gave to the LDS blog, Times and Seasons <www.timesandseasons.org>, was intended by Jennings to be a blog posting and never a SUNSTONE article. In running as large a portion of the interview as we did without express permission, SUNSTONE violated "fair use" guidelines, which we deeply regret. We extend our sincerest apologies to Ken Jennings and the Times and Seasons listowners.*

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