

## FROM THE EDITOR

## ALL WE HAVE

By Dan Wotherspoon



## THE GOAL

To create a complete digital library of all past and current symposium sessions and magazines and have them available by the end of 2005

## OUR PROGRESS

We at the Sunstone office are able to keep digitally current but need your support in order to complete the digitization of 3,000 or so past symposiums.

## THE PLAN

We're launching a special drive to raise \$10,000 by mid-September to cover the cost of necessary additional equipment and labor.

During the next 100 days, we're asking 100 of our friends to contribute \$100 each. All donated funds will be put directly to this project.

## THE FOLLOW-UP

We will keep you informed of progress on both the growth of the digital collections and the giving campaign via [www.sunstoneonline.com](http://www.sunstoneonline.com) and in coming issues of SUNSTONE.

*I would not give a fig for the simplicity  
this side of complexity, but I would  
give my life for the simplicity on the  
other side of complexity.*  
—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

*I will give up all that I possess, yea,  
I will forsake my kingdom, that I may  
receive this great joy. . . . I will give  
away all my sins to know thee. . . .*  
—KING LAMONI'S FATHER  
(Alma 22:15-18)

GIVING UP ONE'S life, forsaking one's kingdom, giving away all one's sins. . . . That's gut-level stuff—will-inesses that come only from the deep parts of souls, determinations that ring true only when expressed by those who've really been in the tussle. We're talking about adult matters here.

A quick glance through this issue of SUNSTONE will reveal that many pieces touch upon the relationship between "faith and doubt."<sup>1</sup> I know—as a topic, it's a Sunstone perennial, a theme that plays in the background of so many of the personal wrestlings that bring folks to our pages and symposiums. And I'd be loathe to admit that I work all the long hours I do in an enterprise having anything to do with "doubt" if I only thought of it in its negative sense. If I didn't also sense its intimate connection with "faith." If I didn't believe that doubt is a portal through which we must pass if we're ever to know the kind of simplicity Holmes is speaking about. If I didn't trust doubting as a necessary companion on the pathway to knowing the God who says his yoke is "easy" and his burden "light" (Matthew 11:30). Hence, even though it's a perennial, I'm excited to see the faith/doubt dynamic foregrounded again.

AS those of you who are regular readers of my editorials may know, I have found a great deal of peace and encouragement in my own wrestle with doubt and faith in the work of James W. Fowler. His *Stages of Faith* showed up in my life twice—the first time while I was feeling

kinda cocky, sure that since I'd straightened out my life and started to fly right again, I had everything figured out; the second time, nine years later, after doubt had busted me up some more. I caught on better the second time.<sup>2</sup>

Fowler's work builds upon insights in child and human development studies that suggest that in order for us to develop a healthy, well-integrated personality, we must successfully perform various developmental tasks and negotiate different "stages" of maturation and growth. The gist of Fowler's work is demonstrating that something similar must occur in the development of deep, abiding faith. That is, if we are to come to know faith at its most mature levels, we must first know but then move beyond earlier forms of faith while still retaining the vitality and gifts of each previous stage.

All stages of faith involve a complex interplay between conscious and unconscious processes and involve many biological, emotional, cognitive, social, and religio-cultural factors which, if not negotiated well, conspire to arrest faith development at a level one would associate with childhood or early adolescence. Nevertheless, Fowler's research shows that most adults manage to successfully create an integrated "set of beliefs, values, and commitments that provide orientation and courage for living."<sup>3</sup> In other words, by the time we reach chronological adulthood, most of us have managed to create a "worldview" of some sort, an understanding about life, a "faith" that includes a sense of morality and purpose which satisfies our basic need for identity, meaning, and hope for the future. This type of faith provides us with an orienting story in which we "live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Given all that can go wrong in a universe composed of freely acting agents, arriving at this stage of faith is a remarkable accomplishment. And in all that follows, I do not want to be read in any way as suggesting that faith of this type isn't worthy of honor and respect.

THERE'S a rub, however, for Fowler also contends that though this is the stage of faith development at which

most adults live out their lives—many of them in perfect contentment—this stage is only halfway to the highest form of faith: full identification with God (which, in deference to non-theistic traditions, Fowler alternatively characterizes as identification with the will and purposes of the universe). Further complicating this picture is Fowler's claim that while the basic thrust of Christ's message (and that of most religious traditions, including, in my opinion, Mormonism) is to bring people to this highest form of faith, the institutional workings of most churches, for complex and largely unconscious reasons, actually discourage adherents from venturing forth from the earlier stage of faith.

In articulating this point, Fowler borrows from Kenneth Keniston the concept of the "modal development level" in communities. In applying this concept to religious communities, Fowler defines the modal developmental level as

*the average expectable level of development for adults in a given com-*

munity. In faith terms, it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in a community all aim. The modal level operates as a kind of magnet in religious communities. Patterns of nurture prepare children and youth to grow up to the modal level—but not beyond it. . . . The operation of the modal level in a community sets an effective limit on the ongoing process of growth in faith.<sup>4</sup>

Fowler's depiction of the stages of faith is not a theology; it does not describe "faith" in terms of specific discursive claims about God or the universe. But Fowler is a Christian—an ordained minister in the United Methodist tradition—and as such, he is especially interested in the implications of his stages-of-faith theory for fellow Christians. Given that, suppose Fowler is right. Suppose there is a dis-

connect between the fundamental thrust of Jesus's gospel and the gravitational pull (the modal developmental level) at work in most Christian communities. What can be done to close this gap?

Fowler states the matter this way:

Discipleship to Christ, if radically followed to full maturity, would bring persons to a way of spending and being spent in their lives that would express loyalty to the rule of God and in covenant relations with a commonwealth of being. In light of this, we ask ourselves, how can faith communities avoid the coerciveness of the modal developmental level, and how can they sponsor appropriate and ongoing lifelong development in faith?<sup>5</sup>

I believe Fowler is right about the kind of life Christ's message calls us toward. I also believe that Fowler's critique of Christian communities in general applies to the Mormon community as well. In Mormonism, the "image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in [our] community all aim" is something short of what the LDS gospel in its highest form calls us toward.

I further believe that the reason our modal developmental level (like that of other traditions) is at a lesser stage is our fear, as a religious community, of the developmental tasks required to pass through the next stage. For according to Fowler's model, if we are to move toward the higher forms of faith, we must be willing to examine our beliefs and centering values from new perspectives. The achievement of the stage at which most adults spend their lives comes about through mostly tacit processes (though once attained, this stage allows us to make incredibly complex and wondrous connections between ideas and principles). But the next step in the journey requires that we move to more explicit examinations of all aspects of our previously held faith. As Fowler puts it, "the previous stage's tacit system of beliefs, values, and commitments must be critically examined. . . . [They] must be allowed to become problematic."<sup>6</sup>

If I'm right in suggesting that fear of this pulling-apart stage—and fear of the "doubt" that naturally accompanies such reexamination—is the main factor in our (or any) religious community's failure to encourage spiritual

## Sun Strokes

### 2005 SUNSTONE WEST

*Our great thanks to all who helped make this year's Sunstone West Symposium a success! The more than a hundred attendees and presenters who participated in the 22–23 April gathering at the San Francisco Airport Clarion were treated to a twenty-three-item smorgasbord of panels and presentations on contemporary LDS theological, historical, and cultural issues. The symposium's plenary sessions featured: a screening and discussion of the film, *Burying the Past*, which wrestles with the Mountain Meadows Massacre and recent efforts toward healing the wounds that have reverberated for the past century and a half; "Humor from the Tightrope," lighthearted but poignant luncheon remarks by LDS writer and poet Carol Lynn Pearson; and D. Michael Quinn's presentation of "To Whom Shall We Go?" (published on page 26 of this issue of SUNSTONE). All symposium sessions are now available for order on cassette tape or CD, and through computer download, at the Sunstone website, <www.sunstoneonline.com>.*

*We also extend heartfelt thanks to this year's Sunstone West planning committee. Laura and Todd Compton worked many, many crazy and aggravating hours coordinating all aspects of the program, and Richard Rands shone once more in dealing with all hotel arrangements and also as a generous underwriter of the film session. It's wonderful working with such good and talented folks, whose hearts also know how to forgive the many frustrations that come with undertakings of this size and complexity. Thank you, friends.*



*Richard Rands, Todd Compton, and Laura Compton receive thanks during the closing session from Sunstone board member Michael Stevens (left); Sunstone West crowd awaits the start of a session*

development beyond its current modal developmental level, it seems to me that the only thing that might change that is to demystify the processes, including doubt, which Fowler's research suggests are necessary steps in the journey ahead. That is, we must clarify what doubt is—and what it is not. We must learn to understand it as an essential ingredient in mature faith, but we must also come to recognize that doubt is only one element in a complex interplay of powerful and dynamic forces, and that achieving the cognitive distance and new perspective doubt provides in no way constitutes an ending point (nor even a high level) of faith. It's a simple thing to start picking things apart, but doubting is part of the complexity, not the simplicity, that Holmes speaks about.

I HAVE much more to say about these dynamics, but space constraints won't allow me to explore them in any more depth until the next SUNSTONE issue. While you spend time engaging this issue and its various musings on doubt and faith, I encourage you to take comfort in the fact that we're on a journey—souls in motion, hearts following the sound of a far-off call. None of you would be reading this magazine nor we working to produce it if our gut wasn't telling us that if we keep following that call, we'll come to know that simplicity that lies on the far side of complexity. We'll find that joy that is worth far more than any kingdom. 5-17

#### NOTES

1. In some ways, this doubt/faith theme chose itself as we decided to publish D. Michael Quinn's article, "To Whom Shall We Go?: Historical Patterns of Restoration Believers with Serious Doubts," and shortly thereafter received and chose to present Gary Bergera's study of President Hinckley's encounter with doubt during his college years. After these major pieces were in place, however, I deliberately selected other texts—the "Of Good Report" book selection (p. 24) and the "Olive Leaf" comments by President Hugh B. Brown (p. 80)—to highlight the issue even more.

2. James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). Originally published, Harper and Row, 1981.

3. James W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 108. Originally published, Harper Collins, 1991.

4. Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 294, emphases in original.

5. *Ibid.*, 295.

6. James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 62.

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Without friends no one would choose to live,  
though he had all other goods. —ARISTOTLE

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