



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

NOTE: *Righteous Dominion* presents stories of leaders and others who are true exemplars of the love of Christ, who have touched lives through their flexibility or their understanding that people are more important than programs. Please email your stories to column editors Alan and Vickie Eastman at: StewartSLC@aol.com.

WALKING TOGETHER

WHEN WE LIVED IN VALLEY FORGE WARD SOME years ago, I attended a New Beginnings evening with my teenaged daughters. Our bishop had been called just a short time before and was giving what I believe was his first talk to the young women. He was a thoughtful, reflective person with a teenaged daughter of his own, and so I was somewhat surprised that he spoke to the girls in a way that portrayed them mostly in terms of having a secondary position to men in the Church. That is, he described their spiritual life in terms of preparing themselves to be married in the temple and to support a husband in his priesthood. In fact, his talk sounded exactly like the talk I had heard in Carol Lynn Pearson's Sunstone symposium presentation, "A Walk in Pink Moccasins." Her gender-role-reversal parody took an all-too-typical "talk to young women" and showed how patronizing—and ridiculous—the concepts sounded when addressed to boys.

Although I didn't know him well, I perceived the bishop to be a "teachable" person, willing to consider new ideas and perspectives. Within a few days, I gave him the audio tape of Pearson's "Pink Moccasins" presentation, cueing it to the start of the parody. Hearing it was a transformative experience for him. He told me it gave him a new perspective on the young women he had been interviewing. He had been surprised to have a number of the girls tell him that they were feeling depressed. The tape helped him realize that perhaps the Young Women's organization should devote more efforts to helping the girls realize their personal potential. Within a few weeks, he called Lou Chandler, a professional working woman as YW president—definitely a new kind of role model for the girls!

When I wrote to Lou recently to ask permission to include her name in telling this story, she wrote back: "I can't claim to

have been a model YW president back then, but this bishop was, indeed, a model of 'righteous dominion.' He exhibited kind and caring service, intelligent leadership, good humor in all things, a zeal and humility for continued learning, and tremendous spiritual strength. His example was inspiring. Alas, his tenure ended all too soon as his work required moving his family to Washington, D.C. To this day, I still consider his example when I find myself in leadership positions."

—KAY GAISFORD
Gilbert, Arizona

Margin Notes

NOTE: *Margin Notes* invites brief commentaries on passages from scripture, fiction or non-fiction works, films, plays, or any other text. As the title indicates, authors could use their literal margin notes as a springboard toward a brief discussion of their experience with or views on the passage. Submissions should begin with a reiteration of the excerpt and be no longer than 500 words. Please send your Margin Notes to column editor, Alison Takenaka, at: <alisontakenaka@hotmail.com>.

THE MELTING POT MELT-DOWN

*Community is the place where the person you
least want to live with always lives.*

—HENRI NOUWEN

MY MOST-VALUED SPIRITUAL MENTORS HAVE taught me that God is to be found in a vast number of faces and faiths, so when I fail to see God reflected in the ranks of local Mormondom, I tend to seek Him elsewhere. During a particularly trying episode, I sank my nose into a book by John Ortberg, a popular evangelical author, who includes the Henri Nouwen quote printed above in his book, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them*. After reading only twenty pages of Ortberg's text, I felt myself unclenching and exhaling in relief that the Mormophobia that I had been experiencing had less to do with the failings of Mormons and more to do with my lofty notions of normalcy and community.

It used to be easier for me to stand and deliver great lessons and talks about the imperative of unity and "perfect harmony" within our LDS faith. But that was when I was living in wards where so many of the members were just like me, or were openly supportive of the choices I was making as a student,

Treasures on Earth

FROM STICK-PULLER TO NUTCRACKER



WE MAY NEVER KNOW EXACTLY HOW MANY ETERNAL mysteries Joseph Smith cracked wide open. But this Joseph Smith nutcracker, a popular item at Salt Lake's Mount Olympus Clock Shop, cracks at least one nugget of truth: Mormon merchandise sells well.

The novelty is handmade by Christian Ulbricht, one of Germany's top nutcracker makers. The item sells for \$239 and has been seen by President Gordon B. Hinckley. According to the store owners, President Thomas S. Monson twice visited the Salt Lake City shop to admire the Joseph Smith nutcracker—together with the Brigham Young nutcracker commissioned in 1997 for the pioneer sesquicentennial.

Neither Ulbricht nor the Mormon prophets go without competition. For \$90 more, Christian Steinbach, Germany's other renowned nutcracker maker, will sell you nutcrackers in the shape of a Mormon missionary companionship. Or, should you change religion, nutcrackers fashioned after John Paul II and Benedict XVI.



LDS Missionaries



Brigham Young



Pope John Paul II

mother, wife, church member, and independent thinker. In retrospect, unity felt easier because I felt more normal and more acceptable to the members of my local unit.

But after my most recent move (now nearly five years ago), I'm beginning to believe that the grand ideal of perfect unity with the greater multitude of Mormonism may not hinge on notions of normalcy or acceptability. In fact, given the apparent and, I believe, God-given diversity within the ranks of our faith, the drive toward a "normal" LDS lifestyle now seems to me an unnecessary, artificial, and even self-defeating cultural phenomenon. Granted, we humans tend to feel more comfortable when we think we are surrounded by like-minded folks. But sameness is not the reality of Mormonism, and comfort doesn't necessarily signal rightness. Forcing a homogeneous model for the sake of building a unified "Zion people" may produce a feeling of loving community for some but,

ironically, generate a feeling of alienation and disunity for many others.

When I consider the reasons Mormons have problems "living" with each other as a "household of God," the list includes things like career choice, family planning, ideas about gender, parenting styles, domestic routines, artistic temperament, public speaking and administrative skills, scriptural interpretation, fashion preference, intellect and intelligence, political philosophies, psychological profiles, and economic aptitude. And in all of these (and other) areas, we often hold ourselves and others to some vague but persistent gauge of "normal" or "abnormal," "acceptable" or "unacceptable," while failing to recognize that diversity of choices may be what gives the pool of human resources in our church its strength.

For the more socially oriented among us, the level of acceptance and respect that we feel from other Mormons may seem

like the crux of Christian ethics and may act as a major influence on our activity in the Church. Certainly, a Christ-led, all-inclusive community is the ultimate goal. But it may be that the immediate future of unity within our religion will finally hinge less upon whether we feel acceptance, respect, or comfort from the like-minded multitude, and more upon whether we will fulfill our altruistic commitment to be useful to others in all ways that we can.

Perhaps that is what will transform enemies into friends in the end. Perhaps that will be the final test of our Christian devotion.

—ALISON TAKENAKA
Essex Junction, Vermont

In the Belly of the Whale

I'M A MORMON, MISTER

In this column, "In the Belly of the Whale," humorist Todd Robert Petersen investigates Mormon culture, art, and politics from the perspective of a baptized outsider. This is Part One of a two-part reflection on Mormon portrayals in pop culture.

THE MOVIE *DONNIE BRASCO* FEATURES A SCENE in which FBI-agent Brasco (played by Johnny Depp) is going over details of his deep-cover assignment with his superior. Brasco has successfully infiltrated the Mafia, and is—we imagine because of his immersion in organized crime—speaking the *lingua franca* of the organization, complete with HBO-level use of the f-word. In the middle of Brasco's expletive-peppered report, he says, "Hey, I need a boat for this f***ing sit down."

His boss, an avowed Latter-day Saint, responds with a line, which despite being so wooden and badly written, might be for many people the most accurate line of Mormon dialogue to come out of Hollywood. This ranking FBI agent, so tough in so many ways, yet still so sensitive to the vicissitudes of the Holy Spirit, says to Brasco in a clipped, almost impatient voice: "I'm a Mormon, mister. Now clean it up."

That line always makes me cringe. Because however stilted and one-dimensional that dialogue seems on an aesthetic level, I know dozens of people who would have said the exact same thing when hearing an f-bomb from someone who, though posing as a member of an organized crime operation, should still know that he can't have the Spirit of the Lord with him when he is using "that kind of language." Interestingly enough, however, the thematic purpose of that moment is to counterpoint what we know from earlier in the film: that this Mormon FBI boss—Blandford is his name—is a hypocrite, a person willing to bend some rules in order to keep others. And we know how the Savior has weighed in on hypocrites.

In my life, the overall effect of a character like Blandford throws a wrench in my attempts to help the Church grow in the eyes of certain groups of people: *Donny Brasco* watchers, for example, but others, too. When a Blandford comes on screen saying something like that, audiences snicker because (Mormon or not) they know someone who would say some-

thing like Blandford, and more often than not, they think people like that are stupid—further evidence that religion is for saps and phonies.

LD PRESENCE IN popular media is a strange one. A few years back, the Church came to life on the airwaves with Julie Stoffer from *Real World*. She was tossed out of BYU for co-habiting on the show, an Honor Code violation, which showed BYU to be an organization of subtlety and intelligence. The Rodin exhibit imbroglio did likewise. The Lord of *Jeopardy!*, Ken Jennings, was buzzworthy for a few weeks but overall had a neutral effect (only confirming many people's suspicions that Mormons are nerds). The most continual fountain of Mormon popularity on television has come from *Survivor*, which brought us Kelly Wigglesworth, Neleh Dennis, and Rafe Judkins—Kelly and Neleh without much controversy; Rafe, on the other hand, made waves by identifying himself as a gay Mormon, which instigated all kinds of murmurings, some of which allowed me to proclaim the gospel, some of which did not.

Mormons have not always fared as well in the media as has President Hinckley. From the early days, we were villains for Sherlock Holmes or the protagonists in mesmerist Mormon "zombie-snatcher" films such as *Trapped by the Mormons* and Zane Gray's *New Riders of the Purple Sage*. More recently, Mormons have appeared as part of the criminal element in *Fletch* and *Ocean's Eleven* (and its sequel). My favorite moment of Mormon infamy, however, is in the novel *Suttree* by Cormac McCarthy, who has his protagonist, Cornelius Suttree, find and read through a copy of the Book of Mormon in a bus station. Suttree's response is a good one (in fact the same as mine before I was baptized). He notes that it is perhaps the strangest book he'd ever read.

Moments like that help, but when I hear banalities like, "I'm a Mormon, mister. Clean it up," I cringe. It's the same response I have when the Larry H. Millers of the world make public spectacles of themselves by purging their multiplexes of films such as *Brokeback Mountain* (see story, page 78). Every time someone like that puts him- or herself in the media spotlight, it becomes harder for me to maintain my respectability in the liberal world as an "out of the closet" Mormon who actually goes to church.

As far as doing good in the liberal world goes, I know lots of Mormon people would ask, "Why bother?" But I'm not the kind of guy who, while flying, will interrupt someone's reading of *Skymall* in order to pass along a message about the gospel. I'm working the missionary thing from a different angle. My wife says I'm like a Frequently Asked Questions page, where the people I work with come to ask about Mormonism—things like: Do Mormons believe in Christ? How come Joseph Smith chose to include the Native Americans in his theology? Why didn't blacks have the priesthood in your church? Do Mormon people believe in the Trinity? Those questions usually give me a good chance to talk about the gospel with people who very likely wouldn't sit down with the missionaries and a flipchart.

All-seeing eye

IS THIS BODY A TEMPLE—OR A VISITORS' CENTER?



LDS PHOTOGRAPHY aficionados were amused by the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane they encountered in the December issue of the trade magazine *American Photo*. The main cover depicts the naked, though not quite altogether exposed, body of Pamela Anderson; the cover of that month's supplement features an LDS bride and groom across the street from the Salt Lake Temple. The supplement, on wedding photography, featured the work of Bry Cox, who has photographed LDS couples in Utah and Arizona.

If the body is a temple, then Anderson, whom the cover calls a “modern goddess,” appears to be inviting the public to something of an open house. Oh yes—and she’s wearing a tattoo.

Our thanks to American Photo and SUNSTONE subscriber, Christian K. Anderson, of State College, Pennsylvania, for alerting us to this story.

When *Donny Brasco* or Larry Miller moments come up, I am forced to become an apologist. I stop fielding doctrinal questions and find myself issuing statements like, “Yeah, but according to the per-screen averages, Utah ranks twelfth in the nation for audiences of *Brokeback Mountain*.” “Larry Miller, yeah, he owns a basketball team, so what can you expect?” “As far as I know, the Eagle Forum is not part of the Mormon Church.” “Jon Krakauer probably should have taken more care to clarify that he wasn’t writing about mainstream Mormonism.”

It seems sometimes that the work of an unofficial Church apologist is never over—like being Bill Clinton’s press secretary during Lewinskygate. It seems as if I’m forever explaining that the Church, in fact, sends around a letter before every election saying it does not endorse or support any particular party or candidate. And I’m forever explaining that one of our apostles, Elder Ballard himself, coined the phrase, “The Doctrine of Inclusion.” Did you all hear that last word: *inclusion*?

My reactions are similar to the way I imagine plenty of good open-hearted Christian folks in the South feel every time some nutcase rises from his knees and gets his deer rifle and drives into town so he can shoot an abortion doctor in the back. I imagine them thinking, “How am I ever going to be Christian

in public again?” When things like the Larry Miller incident happen, I wonder how I am ever going to convince anyone that the gospel does something more than create people who think that banning a film about bisexual cowboys is going to net even one more temple marriage, is going to keep one more priesthood holder from downloading porn from the internet, is going to make my job as a member missionary even one iota easier than before.

It’s hard enough to build enough trust that my neighbors could entertain the notion there might be room for them in my church without these media mavericks pretending to speak for my church. In some cases, it’s not their fault. I understand that they just do what they think is right and the news media turns them into a synecdoche, either with or without their consent. But if you listen to enough responses to scriptural application questions in Sunday School, you’ll find that more than a few Mormons think this is how you keep yourself in the world but not of it—that the only way to move the gospel forward is to stand up and walk out of that R-rated movie or to refuse that cocktail or cup of coffee with the phrase, “I’m Mormon,” instead of simply saying, “No thanks.”

—TODD ROBERT PETERSEN
Cedar City, Utah



The Sugar Beet

“All the Mormon News That’s Fit to Print”

HOME TEACHER’S REPROOF GRATEFULLY RECEIVED

By Paul Allen

RUPERT, ID—Riley Hamilton’s sharp criticisms of the inactive family that he home teaches were met with tears of gratitude, despite the concerns of his 17-year-old companion. According to Blayne Thompson, a priest in the Rupert 12th Ward, the entire Meyers family will be back in full fellowship in no time as a direct result of the Spirit-induced rebuke offered by his companion.

“I have to admit, I was pretty scared when Brother Hamilton started raking Brother Meyers over the coals for neglecting his priesthood responsibilities,” reports Thompson. “And I thought for sure he crossed the line when he called Sister Meyers a whore in Babylon for pursuing her career as an anesthesiologist and neglecting her duty to raise up righteous children instead.”

Thompson’s fears were apparently unfounded, as both Meyerses insist that their lives have changed for the better as a result of a caring home teacher who loved them enough to correct their evil ways.

“We had lost sight of the important things in life,” says Rob Meyers, a CPA with Meyers, Murdock, and Harris. “Like tithing, for instance. I haven’t paid a dime since my mission, but when Brother Hamilton condemned me to hell for holding back that which rightfully belonged to Heavenly Father, I knew it was time to reprioritize. He was shouting at me, spittle flying everywhere, the very things I needed to hear most. Scary, wet, and necessary.”

According to Hamilton, he had not intended to offer such a strong rebuke when he left that evening to meet with the Meyers family. However, when he arrived at the house and observed the new boat in the driveway, he realized that this was a couple that had strayed. At that point, the Spirit began to work at him, and once he had been seated, he unleashed his concerns with righteous indignation.

Sister Meyers reflects fondly on that evening. “I have been unable to have children,” she said, “and as a medical doctor, I was trained to believe that it was due to endometriosis. Brother Hamilton’s chastisement that evening helped me realize that it was more likely my lack of faith that was preventing me from having children. I think his exact words

were, ‘If you weren’t a slut before the Lord, whoring after material possessions as Satan would have you, your womb would not be barren, but would yield fruit. I promise you that if you repent of your wicked ways, the Lord will release your ovaries from the grasp of the Adversary!’ Something like that. I so appreciate his concern on my behalf!”

Bishop Thayne D. Hanson of the 12th Ward is delighted with Brother Hamilton’s success in bringing the Meyerses back to Church. “It’s brethren like this who make the home teaching program the huge success that it is. Brother Hamilton may not have been able to keep his job as a delivery driver for Pizza Hut, but he knows how to deliver the right message at the right time.” The Bishop hopes that Brother Hamilton will show an “increase in love afterward,” now that the sharp reproof has been delivered with such deadly accuracy.

Referring to himself as “The Howitzer of the Lord,” Brother Hamilton responded to the bishop’s comment by saying, “Increased love is for sissies—or the Relief Society. I’m an arrow in the Lord’s quiver, not a casserole.”

Views from the Street

Our prophet counseled us to read the Book of Mormon by the end of 2005. Why didn’t you finish?



I downloaded it onto my iPod Shuffle, and I think it played all the chapters, but they weren’t in order, so I can’t be sure.



I avoid all reading material that features gratuitous violence, as our prophet has advised.



I am serving as Primary President. This gives me an automatic exemption from all other Church duties.



Every time I tried to read, the ghost of Mark Twain appeared, held a chemical-smelling handkerchief over my nose, and made me pass out.



I distinctly heard him say to read David Foster Wallace’s Consider the Lobster, but even my wife says I’m wrong.



What? The Book of Mormon movie covers only the first two books? It seemed a lot longer than that.