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THE SUNSTONE EDUCATION FOUNDATION

The mission of The Sunstone Education Foundation is to sponsor open forums of Mormon thought and experience. Under the motto, "Faith Seeking Understanding," we examine and express the rich spiritual, intellectual, social, and artistic qualities of Mormon history and contemporary life. We encourage humanitarian service, honest inquiry, and responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people and what they hold sacred.

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CORRECTION



In our October 2007 SUNSTONE issue, we incorrectly attributed the short reflection "Worshiping Together and Other Fantasies" (page 39) to blogger Courtney K. at Segullah. The real author of that piece was blogger "MADHOUSEWIFE" who posted it 21 June 2007 on Feminist Mormon Housewives. We are very sorry for this error.

BLOOMING VITALITY

CONGRATULATIONS TO SUNSTONE for providing such an interesting array of feminine voices in your October 2007 issue. It was a pleasure to read such informed, intelligent, vibrant, humorous, and important expressions of what it means to be Mormon and woman at the beginning of the twenty-first century! These voices remind us of how much women contribute to our common religious conversation when given a chance to speak, and how much poorer we are when those voices are silenced or not given adequate opportunity for expression. And Michael Farnworth's "The Heroine's Journey" and D. Jeff Burton's imaginative story in his "Braving the Borderlands" column added important male perspectives.

Given limited space, I can't comment on every important expression; nevertheless, I single out the essay by Community of Christ apostle, Susan Skoor, both for what it says and for the photograph of her participating in the ordination of a member of the Community of Christ First Presidency. That image seems somehow similar to pictures in my imagination of what we Latter-day Saints might wish for in an ideal church. There may be reasons why such a scene would never happen in the Mormon Church (and I can anticipate the voices of disapproval for even wishing it), but it is impossible for me not to imagine my own wife and daughters and the many good Mormon women I respect and admire in a similar circumstance. I am touched by Apostle Skoor's testimony that God's grace and peace "will always be with each of us, healing our brokenness, using our

weaknesses, continuing to call us into discipleship and sending us into the world to build the peaceable kingdom that includes all persons."

There is a vitality in this collection of personal women's voices that is essential to our full flowering as a people. I say, let a thousand feminine voices bloom in our sometimes arid and male-dominated landscape! The colorful photographs on the cover also reveal how essential feminine beauty is to our spiritual life. My guess is that *Dialogue*, *SUNSTONE*, and *Exponent II* have been among the most important avenues of expression for feminine voices among the Mormons for the past forty plus years, and that in being so, they have influenced the official organs of the Church to include more women.

It is significant that this special issue followed the issue featuring Margaret Merrill Toscano's cover article, "Are Boys More Important than Girls? The Continuing Conflict of Gender Difference and Equality in Mormonism." As the father of two boys and two girls raised in the Church, and as someone who has held many ecclesiastical positions over the years, I know that the answer to that question is a resounding "Yes." When I was Young Men's president in the Westwood Ward's combined YM and YW program, I was aware that boys had more privilege, more authority, more responsibility, more recognition, and more fun than girls did—and to a large extent, the girls knew it, too. As bishop of a large singles' ward in Los Angeles, I saw the effects of diminished self-esteem among many young Mormon women. Many more women than men in my ward doubted God's love for them. Far fewer had a clear sense of their mission in life, especially if they were unable to find a priesthood partner.

After reading Toscano's thoughtful, enlightened article, I was disappointed to see David Richardson's response in the October 2007 letters section. If Richardson was unable to find anything of faith or understanding in Toscano's article, it seems to me that it must be because he is blinded by his own prejudice against the subject or the author. He seems to consider Toscano's reasoned challenge of certain statements, practices, and policies as inappropriate because they include statements by President Gordon B. Hinckley, and yet her commentary on these texts and their symbolic meaning is absolutely germane to her subject. What more important source could one cite than the offi-

cial statements of the prophet? It is clear from Toscano's text that while she challenges aspects of President Hinckley's teachings, she both values and appreciates his desire to create a more equitable church.

Richardson also questions SUNSTONE's decision to give its cover spotlight to this article because of its author's excommunicated status. It seems he would have her excommunicated not only ecclesiastically but intellectually as well. Richardson must be aware that, at one time, several members of the original nineteenth-century Quorum of the Twelve were excommunicated, and that some excommunications are unfair and unwarranted. He surely also knows that history is replete with good people (e.g., Martin Luther, Cervantes, Queen Elizabeth, and the entire population of Venice!) who were excommunicated for saying and doing things that earned the disapproval of established ecclesiastical authorities. The issue isn't Toscano's ecclesiastical status but the soundness of her argument, the objectivity with which she states her case, and the tone of her language. In all of these, I contend, she comports herself well, meeting expected standards of academic discourse, and SUNSTONE should be commended for giving her article the attention it did.

Richardson complains that Toscano's article provides neither faith nor understanding, but I for one feel that over the years Margaret Toscano's writing and speaking have strengthened my faith and enlarged my understanding. Most of all, she causes me to think, to challenge my own axiomatic truths, and to be open to new understanding. Her article on gender equality is only her latest valuable contribution to the life of the mind and the spirit among the Mormons.

ROBERT A. REES
Brookdale, California

FAR FROM VOICELESS

I WAS A BIT NERVOUS to read Holly Welker's "Clean Shaven: No More Beards: Straight Women, Gay Men, and Mormonism" in the October 2007 SUNSTONE. I fully expected Welker to set me up as a con-

venient straw man for her arguments as she had done in other forums. I was happy to find, however, that not only did Welker avoid misrepresenting me (misinterpretation is not the same as misrepresentation), but she wrote a fascinating, insightful article.

Although I believe Welker's argument falls short due to its reliance on a simplistic and self-congratulatory characterization of Mormon women as "naively and earnestly hopeful," she does raise many valid and important questions about marriage relationships in general and specifically those of straight women married to gay men. Ultimately, Welker advocates causes I wholeheartedly support: gender equality and the legal right of consenting adults "to marry any other consenting adult who wants to marry them."

Lest anyone think that Mormon women married to gay men are so subjugated and voiceless that they need someone like Welker to speak for them, though, I'd like to direct SUNSTONE readers to a few venues where these women act not as the objects of Welker's narrative but as the subjects of their own. My wife, Jessie, blogs at FOXJ.BLOGSPOT.COM, where the relative importance of her husband's sexual orientation in her day-to-day life is reflected in how infrequently it's the topic of her posts. A friend who goes by the name "Leslie" blogs about her relationship

with her gay husband at WIFEOFAGAYMORMON.BLOGSPOT.COM. Both Jessie and Leslie, as well as others married to gay men, post on LDSLIGHTS.ORG alongside a handful of faithful gay Mormons. And, representing the straight men married to gay women to whom Welker alludes in a footnote, the pseudonymous Darrin Stevens blogs at MORTAL-REALM.BLOGSPOT.COM.

I applaud Holly Welker for her concern for the well-being of straight Mormon women married to gay men; the person I care for more than any other happens to fall into that category. Amid all the rhetoric of protecting women from the evils of patriarchy, though, let's not ignore the voices of those women (and men) who agree with Welker's premise that satisfying sexual relationships require "great generosity and sensitivity on the part of everyone involved," and have found those qualities in their relationships with their gay spouses.

BEN CHRISTENSEN
Seattle, Washington

INTERESTING EXCHANGE

AFTER READING HAROLD BLOOM'S perspective on the difference between the theology of Joseph Smith and the theology of his contemporary successor, Gordon B. Hinckley, in the March 2007 SUNSTONE, I



"It's my own concoction. . . . A little bit of blacks and the priesthood, a healthy dose of polygamy—both Joseph Smith and post-manifesto—and a dash of hats and peepstones."

JEANNETTE ATWOOD

wish to enter into the historical record an intriguing response in 2000 by Professor Bloom to an invitation to speak at Brigham Young University.

On 14 September 2000, I wrote to invite Bloom to speak at a BYU forum (and to other possible audiences) sometime the following semester. Writing in behalf of the BYU administration and as director of BYU's Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature, I was able to offer expenses, plus a generous honorarium and other inducements for Bloom to visit BYU. I concluded the invitation, lightly: "I hope that you can come out to BYU, where you'll find a goodly bunch of what Joseph Smith taught us are members of the Tribe of Ephraim waiting to be instructed (and delighted) by Harold Bloom, a fellow Israelite."

On 20 September 2000, Professor Bloom sent a gracious decline of the invitation, handwritten on Yale University, English Department letterhead. The letter's intriguing final sentence reveals Bloom's identification with and embrace of Mormonism as the institutional embodiment of Joseph Smith's astounding restoration of authentic Pre-Hebraic theology—a thesis he argues for ex-

tensively in his book *The American Religion*.

Dear Professor Cracroft:

I am honored by the invitation, but—with authentic sorrow—must decline. I have turned seventy, continue to teach full-time at Yale, part-time at NYU, and to write and edit non-stop. Survival depends upon staying away from all other institutions, until and unless I ever retire. But I regret saying 'no' because I have a high regard for you, and if not Jewish would be among you.

With high regard,
Harold Bloom

Bloom's SUNSTONE essay, which contains the question, "How much of Joseph abides in contemporary Salt Lake City?" suggests that in ensuing years, Bloom has revised his perspective somewhat, seeing modern Mormonism as a diminished "routinization" of Joseph's theology. It may be that such change is inevitable in institutionalizing Joseph's startling doctrines. I prefer to see the contemporary Church as Joseph Smith's lengthened shadow.

RICHARD H. CRACROFT
Orem, Utah

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SUNSTONE

is excited to announce the formal launch of the

Mapping Mormon Issues PROJECT



MAPPING MORMON ISSUES IS A NEW SUNSTONE INITIATIVE. Our goal is to commission “framing articles” on topics that challenge serious students of Mormonism. These articles will deliver reliable information about these difficult aspects of LDS history, theology, and Church administration in a fair, balanced way. The Mapping Mormon Issues initiative will also make these articles and supporting materials available in multiple formats.

Over a period of more than thirty years, independent Mormon studies journals, SUNSTONE included, have published a wealth of scholarship on issues such as polygamy, blacks and the priesthood, folk magic, the translation of the Pearl of Great Price, and the relationship between Mormonism and Freemasonry—issues that often trouble Latter-day Saints who encounter them. One problem with the current state of discourse on these and other difficult subjects is that in most cases, the scholarship has been presented in bits and pieces. It is therefore hard for someone coming to the issues for the first time to get an easy yet substantive orientation to the discussion—its history, major findings, and arguments. As the discussions have unfolded, the main groups currently engaged in discussing these issues are either anti-Mormon organizations or LDS apologetic foundations, which results in presentations shaped by the group’s overarching agenda to lead people out of Mormonism or keep them safely within the fold.

Sunstone feels that it is uniquely positioned to fill the void left by these competing agendas by providing fair, reliable, and comprehensive windows into these issues. As a well-established, independent organization whose mission is to sponsor open forums about all aspects of Mormonism and foster an environment of free and respectful inquiry, Sunstone can use its magazine, symposia, podcasts, blogs, and other forms of outreach to frame challenging issues in ways that will be helpful to thoughtful Latter-day Saints who encounter them, but without pushing inquirers toward a particular outcome regarding their faith journey.

THE MAPPING MORMON ISSUES (MMI) project will commission articles that can orient students within the ongoing discourse about various difficult issues. These articles will strive to be dispassionate summaries of the issues—how the debates have unfolded over time, what the main arguments are for this position over that one—instead of actually weighing in on the debates themselves. Each completed article will be published in SUNSTONE magazine and online through the Sunstone website, a new version of which is just weeks away from launch. In addition to written text, MMI will offer interviews with experts and key players in the discussions of each topic, as well as other audio and visual helps to students of the issue. The project will also offer links to free versions of past and current Sunstone symposium discussions about each topic and will actively seek permission to provide links to the best scholarship in other journals and forums.

To be successful, the Mapping Mormon Issues project will require considerable commitments of time, effort, and money. MMI will be administered by a group of people consisting of the SUNSTONE editor, two Sunstone board members, and several people outside the formal Sunstone organizational structure who are committed to the serious study of Mormon issues and the project’s success.

WE ARE THRILLED to announce that the fundraising campaign has begun with a bang as long-time Sunstone friends MIKE AND RONDA CALLISTER have pledged to match up to \$5,000 in donations others send to the Mapping Mormon Issues project. *They invite you to join them! Will you pledge your support today?*

TO DONATE or learn more about the Mapping Mormon Issues project, please visit WWW.SUNSTONEMAGAZINE.COM, contact Sunstone by phone at 801.355.5926, or email us at MMI@SUNSTONEMAGAZINE.COM.

We look forward to partnering with you in providing this window into vital discussions for those seeking to better understand Mormonism’s past and present.

