

UPDATE

PRESIDENT MONSON PRESIDES
OVER GENERAL CONFERENCE

President Thomas S. Monson speaks at the April 2008 General Conference, Monson's first as Church president.

LDS PRESIDENT THOMAS S. MONSON PRESIDED LAST April over his first general conference as Church president, a conference that included expressions of gratitude, affirmations of respect toward all religions, and counsel on the sensitive topic of sexual abuse.

"This has been a wonderful conference," said Monson, who was ordained Church president 3 February. "We have been edified by wise and inspired messages. Our testimonies have been strengthened. I believe we are all the more determined to live the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ."

"I express my great love for all those who have participated and to all of you who have listened," the octogenarian leader added. "I have felt your prayers in my behalf and have been sustained and blessed during the two months since our beloved President Hinckley left us. Once again, I appreciate your sustaining vote."

"We Honor All Religions"

IN A SPEECH titled "Faith of Our Fathers," President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, who was born in Czechoslovakia of German parents, explained that his ancestors were not among the pioneers who made the journey across the plains. "But as a member of the Church," he added, "I claim with gratitude and pride this pioneer legacy as my own."

"When my own family contemplates the phrase 'faith of our fathers,' often it is the Lutheran faith that comes to mind," Uchtdorf continued. "For generations, our ancestors belonged to that denomination. In fact, my son recently discovered that one of our family lines connects back to Martin Luther himself."

"We honor and respect sincere souls from all religions, no matter where or when they lived, who have loved God, even

without having the fullness of the gospel," Uchtdorf added. "We lift our voices in gratitude for their selflessness and courage. We embrace them as brothers and sisters, children of our Heavenly Father."

Sexual Abuse Discussed

APOSTLE RICHARD G. SCOTT talked about sexual abuse, revisiting a topic he had discussed in general conference 16 years earlier. Elder Scott's speech included advice to the victims, to perpetrators, to parents, and to Church leaders.

"As impossible as it may seem to you now, in time, the healing you can receive from the Savior will allow you to truly forgive the abuser and even have feelings of sorrow for him or her," Scott said. "When you can forgive the offense, you will be relieved of the pain and heartache that Satan wants in your life by encouraging you to hate the abuser."

Scott admitted it is hard sometimes for ecclesiastical leaders to believe the victim. "Do not be discouraged if initially a bishop hesitates when you identify an abuser," he said. "Remember that predators are skillful at cultivating a public appearance of piety to mask their despicable acts."

Marion Smith, an LDS author who has often written and spoken on the issue of sexual abuse, feels that Scott's message was sensitive and compassionate. At the same time, she wishes Scott had been more direct in encouraging victims of sexual abuse to report the abuse to civil authorities and in encouraging perpetrators not only to go to their Church leaders, but also to apologize to the victim, to make whatever reparation is possible, and to go to therapy.

"I agree with Elder Scott that forgiving is the ultimate way of healing, yet the problem is that forgiveness is not a process that can be forced on the victims," Smith told SUNSTONE. "For victims of sexual abuse, forgiving themselves is more urgent than forgiving their perpetrators."

"Victims may not be ready to forgive," Smith added. "Before asking them to forgive, bishops must convey empathy and compassion. What victims need the most is to know that they're loved."

New Apostle Named

DURING THE OPENING session of the conference, Elder D. Todd Christofferson, 63, was appointed as the newest member of the Quorum of the Twelve, filling the vacancy left by President Uchtdorf's call to the First Presidency. Born 24 January 1945, in American Fork, Utah, Elder Christofferson received a bachelor's degree from BYU and a juris doctorate from Duke. He was an associate general counsel of Nations Bank Corp. (now Bank of America) and practiced law in Washington DC, Tennessee, and North Carolina.

A returned missionary, bishop, stake president, and regional representative, Christofferson was sustained to the First



Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Quorum of the Seventy in 1993. In the intervening 15 years, he and his wife have traveled to 44 countries on six continents.

As executive director of the Family and Church History Department, Christofferson reaffirmed in 2005 an agreement with Jewish organizations to block the names of Holocaust victims from being submitted to

temple work (see SUNSTONE, May 2005, 72–73).

During an 5 April press conference between general conference sessions, Christofferson was asked why a non-American was not called as an apostle.

“It’s just a question of time,” the junior apostle replied, “and that will come to pass.”

“Remember, though, that we are not called to represent any place, any group, any region,” he added. “We don’t need to try to tell the Lord about his sheep and how to take care of them. He knows them better than we do.”

Christofferson said President Monson extended the call to him forty-eight hours before the beginning of the conference. Christofferson said he first felt “a degree of incredulity and a deep sense of humility.”

“At the same time, [I felt] a great sense of gratitude for the trust that is manifest in such a calling,” he added. “Since then, thinking more about it, I’ve felt something of a real anxiousness to be out and about and involved. I look forward to doing that the rest of my life.”

CHURCH ASKS CALIFORNIAN MORMONS TO HELP BAN GAY MARRIAGE—AGAIN

ON 20 JUNE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY sent a letter asking LDS Church members in California to “do all you can” to support Proposition 8, which would amend the constitution of California and reverse a recent decision by the California Supreme Court allowing same-sex couples to marry.

“The Church’s teachings and position on this moral issue are unequivocal,” reads the letter that was directed to be read from the pulpit in California wards on 29 January. “Marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God, and the formation of families is central to the Creator’s plan for His children. Children are entitled to be born within this bond of marriage.”

“We ask that you do all you can to support the proposed constitutional amendment

by donating of your means and time to assure that marriage in California is legally defined as being between a man and a woman. Our best efforts are required to preserve the sacred institution of marriage.”

Maurine Proctor, editor-in-chief of the Meridian Magazine website, fears that unless the constitutional amendment is passed, California will be “exporting same-sex marriage possibly to every state in the nation.”

“Residents of other states whose marriage laws do not allow genderless marriage can come to California, get their nuptials, and then head home claiming their marriage is legal,” she wrote at MERIDIANMAGAZINE.COM. “This not only opens the door for legal chaos, but for courts, along with rogue state officials, to systematically dismantle state statutes and amendments designed to protect the traditional definition of marriage.”

Since the letter began circulating, several dissenting grassroots Mormons organizations have spoken against the proposed amendment. These include Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, Signing for Something, the Safe Space Coalition, and Mormons for Marriage.

“We stand united in the belief that each individual should have the civil right to marry the spouse of their choice and to have that union recognized by civil authorities,” wrote the owners of SIGNINGFORSOMETHING.ORG. “[This stance] runs contrary to the LDS Church’s current policy, which asks its members to actively work toward making marriage between one man and one woman the only legal option. Our goal is to empower members of the LDS Church in sharing their views and making political decisions for themselves.”

“We are deeply dismayed that the Church ignored our request that they not meddle in California politics,” said Olin



“Sorry guys. . . Still no recommend.”

Thomas, executive director of Affirmation. “This initiative will hurt so many people. Without marriage, a couple who have been together thirty years could be torn apart at the doorway to the emergency room.”

According to a recent *Los Angeles Times*/KTLA poll, 41 percent of Californians surveyed approve the state Supreme Court’s decision to allow same-sex couples to marry while 52 percent disapproved of the decision. There are more than 750,000 Mormons living in California, making them just over 2 percent of the state’s population.

LDS CHURCH CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY OF 1978 REVELATION

IN AN EVENING FILLED WITH SPEECHES, PRAYERS, AND music, more than 2,500 people gathered in the Tabernacle on Temple Square on 8 June to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the LDS Church lifting the ban on black men receiving the priesthood and on families of African descent receiving temple blessings.

Catherine Stokes, one of the speakers, quoted Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who shortly after the 1978 announcement told students at BYU, “It’s time for disbelieving people to get in line and believe in a living prophet.”

Stokes urged her audience to “reach out to those with a lack of understanding about this matter . . . that we might help them come unto Christ and by so doing, help ourselves to come unto Christ. Since our coming to this land in chains, I believe it was the blessing of forgiving that enabled us to survive. Today we’re capable of even more—of loving those who do not love us.”

“Do we have a ways to go? Yes—a very long way to go. But we’re raising a generation so much less color-conscious than the last one. . . . I have great hope for the future.”

Two African American stake presidents, Ahmad Corbitt, of the New Jersey Cherry Hill Stake, and Fred A. Parker, of the Miami Stake, were among the speakers. Soloist Alex Boye of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir sang two hymns, and choir director Mack Wilberg led a multicultural choir of more than 300 voices.

Elder Sheldon F. Child of the Seventy spoke about his experiences serving as a mission president in New York City and living in West Africa.

“There are no strangers or foreigners among those who enjoy the blessing of the priesthood, make sacred covenants, and keep them,” said Child. “They belong to the household of God. Because of God’s love for all his children, in every gospel dispensation, he has placed prophets on the earth to communicate his will to them. His love and his will was made manifest to us on 8 June 1978.”

This is the first event of this kind officially sponsored by the Church. Five years ago, the Church provided space for a low-key celebration sponsored by the Genesis group, a Church organization for Latter-day Saints of African descent.

Darius Gray, who in 1971 helped organize the Genesis group, told the *Deseret News* that for many blacks who con-

Celluloid Watch

CUT AND RECUT: NEW EMMA SMITH FILM SKIRTS POLYGAMY

EMMA SMITH, FIRST WIFE OF THE PROPHET JOSEPH Smith Jr., finally stepped out of the footnotes of Church history with the release of the feature film *Emma Smith: My Story*.



Scene from *Emma Smith: My Story*

The film, which premiered 9 April in Sandy, Utah, combines material used in the recent LDS-produced *Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration* with new footage, presented as a series of flashbacks as an aged Emma Smith reminisces about her life.

The scene most commented upon portrays Emma in a fictional conversation about polygamy with her daughter Julia. According to THE-EXPONENT.COM, the dialogue in the film’s general-release version goes something like this:

EMMA: There are still places and rapids in the river.

JULIA: Polygamy was one of those rapids for you.

Wasn’t it?

EMMA: Yes, it was.

JULIA: And, yet, you’ve never spoken of it.

EMMA: What could I say?

However, in a different version shown in advance screenings last November, Emma went on to explain that, despite her struggles with polygamy, she eventually concluded that it was of God, even testifying to Julia of it. This material was cut from the general-release version.

It is not clear when the decision was made to recut the film; but Mike Kennedy, one of the producers and a descendant of Joseph and Emma, told the *Deseret News* that leaders of the LDS Church attended an early screening in mid-March.

“Our purpose was to understand her nature and personality, rather than to interpret how she dealt with [Joseph

Smith's polygamy]," said Kennedy. "She never really discussed it. She didn't like talking about it. . . . These were not things that you talked about."

"Maybe this is too big to try and tackle, maybe we should be glad it was mentioned at all," conclude EmilyCC and Jessawhy on the Mormon feminist site THE-EXPONENT.COM. "But, this seems like the easy way out."

Some critics complain that the movie focuses too much on Emma's famous husband Joseph Smith Jr., casting Emma back into the recesses of her own story. "It is merely Emma's side of Joseph Smith's story," writes Blogger Jason Pyles. "Her beautiful moments are eclipsed by [the film's] shameless dips into blatantly overblown melodrama."

"At one point, a distraught Emma yells for Joseph and is shown running toward him in slow motion," Pyles continues in a review posted at EDISONMEN.BLOGSPOT.COM. "Meanwhile, the soundtrack's music swells, and even her speaking of his name is drawn out into painful slow motion."

"The portrayal of their marriage is idyllic and feels false," EmilyCC and Jessawhy remark. "We missed seeing some real character development between [Emma and Joseph] as all of their interactions were positive."

Linda King Newell, who co-authored *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith*, feels that most of the dialogue and information are historically accurate. "I don't have an argument with the accuracy of what they portrayed as far as what their purpose in making the film was," Newell told SUNSTONE. "It's just not the whole story."

"Polygamy was a huge struggle for Emma," Newell added. "But the movie itself is a faith-promoting movie and a family-promoting movie. I think it will touch a lot of people and bring greater understanding of a woman who for over a hundred years was vilified by the Church, and give her a more prominent and rightful place."

Salt Lake Tribune film critic Sean Means was less forgiving: "This melodramatic biography depicts Emma Hale Smith as a dutiful wife and helpmate to her husband, Joseph Smith Jr., during the early history of the [LDS] Church," Means wrote. "But the movie is so stifflingly reverential that it would fit better in an LDS visitor center . . . than in a place that sells popcorn."

DUTCHER'S FALLING EXPLORES DARKER TERRITORY

IF YOU THOUGHT THAT RICHARD DUTCHER'S *STATES of Grace* was edgy, wait until you see *Falling*, the R-rated movie he wrote in 1999 but only released earlier this year.

Falling focuses on the difficult choices made by Eric Boyle (played by Richard Dutcher), a freelance videographer and

lapsed Mormon who makes a small fortune when he sells footage of a gang murder to a Los Angeles news station. The action of the film is rife with violence and intensity, which one reviewer describes as "grueling and painful to an almost medieval extent." Instead of wrapping up neatly, the story ends with an ambiguous scene that leaves the viewer unsettled and unsure about the film's message.

Film critic Sean Means compares Dutcher's artistic and spiritual journey to that of playwright Neil LaBute and novelist Brian Evenson, artists who found Mormon cultural standards too confining for their creativity.

"The doctrines of Mormonism . . . demand that an artist grow as much as he can," Dutcher told Means. "But the culture certainly doesn't."

Wade Major, film critic for *BoxOffice* magazine believes Dutcher's films, as they have grown darker and more provocative, have also become "more mainstream and meditative, embracing themes that few other filmmakers of faith



Eric Boyle (played by Richard Dutcher) collapses after filming a gang murder in the movie *Falling*.

would dare even acknowledge."

"Some will see a more petty agenda here—Dutcher angrily stabbing back at both Mormonism and Hollywood for their perceived slights and offenses," Major wrote. "But the reality is more complex, a filmmaker still wrestling with his faith and his art, and flatly refusing to allow his audience the luxury of not caring one way or the other."

"It's an important and indelible work," Major concludes, "excruciatingly difficult to watch and impossible to forget."

Dutcher wrote the screenplay for *Falling* around the time he released *God's Army*, his first Mormon-themed feature film. At the time, Dutcher was undergoing what, at the 2007 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium, he called a spiritual rebirth.

"I wanted to write something purely for myself," Dutcher told Means. "When I wrote [*Falling*], there would have been more of a feeling of hope, of redemption. I think that's still there. It's just harder."

sider joining the Church, the history of Mormon racism continues to be a painful issue.

“Before this church can move forward, we need to acknowledge the dead mule in the room, clean it out, and air it out,” Gray said. “For me, an apology isn’t the issue—teaching correct principles is.”

Since the LDS Church has never issued an apology or repudiated racist statements of the past, black members hope new statements will eventually replace old teachings—such as the speculation that peoples of African descent were “less valiant” in the pre-existence.

“This folklore is not part of and never was taught as doctrine of the church,” LDS spokesman Mark Tuttle told *Salt Lake Tribune’s* reporter Peggy Fletcher Stack. He added that the Church has no policy against interracial marriage, nor does it teach that everyone in heaven will be white.

CHURCH WANTS HANDBOOK REMOVED FROM WEBSITE

THE LDS CHURCH HAS FILED A FORMAL COPYRIGHT infringement claim with the Wikimedia Foundation. It claims that Wikimedia violated copyright by posting the Church Handbook of Instructions to the World Wide Web.

The handbook, which contains information on many ecclesiastical procedural issues, both trivial and sensitive, is available via WikiLeaks, a site dedicated to disseminating censored documents of various kinds. Although focused mainly on oppressive political regimes in Asia, WikiLeaks also contains sensitive documents relating to the Church of Scientology and other organizations.

In a statement to WikiNews, a WikiLeaks representative stated, “WikiLeaks will not remove the handbooks, which are of substantial interest to current and former Mormons. WikiLeaks will remain a place where people from around the world can safely reveal the truth.”

Since the original claim was filed, WikiLeaks has posted other LDS documents, including the 20 June First Presidency letter asking Californians to campaign and vote against same-sex marriage.

In 1999, the LDS Church successfully forced the Utah Lighthouse Ministry to remove from its website pages of the handbook which described the procedure members must follow to resign their membership from the Church.

ALLEGED JOSEPH SMITH IMAGE CAUSES INTERNET FUROR

THE CHURCH HAS ISSUED A STATEMENT DISTANCING itself from the Scannel daguerreotype, a purported image of the Prophet Joseph Smith which scores of Latter-day Saints have been circulating over the Internet under the belief that it had been or was about to be authenticated by the Church.

“Some persons have mistakenly claimed that this image belongs to the [LDS Church] and that Church officials have verified or are verifying its authenticity,” the 19 March statement read.



The daguerreotype image some believe to be of Joseph Smith.

“These claims are not true.”

The picture, which is owned by the Community of Christ, is analyzed in a new book by LDS author S. Michael Tracy, *Millions Shall Know Brother Joseph Again*. A computer technologist who has compared the death mask of Joseph Smith to 1928 pictures of his skull, Tracy believes that the daguerreotype is very likely Joseph Smith, but admits that provenance (an explanation linking the owner of the artifact

to its alleged origins) is missing.

“The individual who gave [the daguerreotype] to the Community of Christ . . . claims to be a descendant of Joseph Smith,” Tracy said in a *Mormon Times* interview, “but we can’t link her back into the Smith family. Because that’s missing, a lot of historians are very uncomfortable with this.”

Daguerreotype expert Dennis Walters told the *Salt Lake Tribune* that the image can’t be Joseph Smith’s. Walters says the quality of the daguerreotype is too good to have been taken before Joseph Smith died in 1844, and he believes the suit the man is wearing did not become fashionable until about 1846. Further, Walters argues, the person pictured looks younger than 34—Joseph Smith’s age when daguerreotypes first became available in 1839.

Tracy, who conducted a 32-point alignment between the face in the photo and Joseph Smith’s death mask, disregards Walters’s objections. Contemporaries commented on Joseph Smith’s “youthful” countenance,” Tracy told the *Tribune*. Tracy believes that because the daguerreotype is slightly out of focus, it may obscure the Prophet’s receding hairline. He also believes one of two new suits the Prophet bought shortly before his martyrdom could match the suit in the photo.

The Community of Christ, which first announced having obtained the daguerreotype in 1995, has never authenticated it (see SUNSTONE, April 1995, 86).

THE VATICAN BANS MORMONS FROM DIGITIZING PARISH RECORDS

A 5 APRIL LETTER FROM THE VATICAN CONGREGATION for Clergy asked all Catholic bishops around the world to keep Latter-day Saints from microfilming and digitizing Catholic records.

Father James Messa, executive director of the U.S. bishops’ Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, said the step was taken to prevent Latter-day Saints from using the family information they gather to posthumously baptize de-

ceased individuals by proxy.

“The problem is with baptisms for the dead,” said Monsignor Terrence Fitzgerald of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City. “I wouldn’t want my mom and dad, who were lifelong Catholics, to be baptized LDS. I don’t think it works, but I still think it’s disrespectful.”

Kathy Kirkpatrick, former president of the Association of Professional Genealogists, finds it ironic that the effects of the ban will be felt by Catholics who rely on LDS Family History Centers to do their family history.

“Most parishes can’t or don’t answer letters because they are understaffed and their highest priority is the living,” Kirkpatrick told *The Salt Lake Tribune*.

In 2001, the Vatican issued a ruling that LDS baptisms are not valid Christian baptisms, meaning that Mormons who convert to Catholicism must be rebaptized.

“We don’t have an issue with the fact that the Catholic Church doesn’t recognize our baptisms, because we don’t recognize theirs,” said LDS spokesperson Mike Otterson. “It’s a difference of belief.”

People



Finished. Second and fifth, Latter-day Saints DAVID ARCHULETA, 17, AND BROOKE WHITE, 25, respectively, contestants in the 2008 season of *American Idol*.

A high school student from Murray, Utah, Archuleta has attracted an intensely devoted fan base, including teenage girls who dub themselves “Archies” or “Arch Angels.” White, from Mesa, Arizona, drew comparisons to musical artists Carly Simon and Carole King.

Appointed. Former Mormon Tabernacle Choir director CRAIG JESSOP, 58, as chair of the Utah State University music department. On 4 March, Jessop resigned abruptly from his prestigious post with the Tabernacle Choir.



Excommunicated. Chad Hardy, 31, the creator of *Mormons Exposed*, a 2008 calendar featuring shirtless returned missionaries (see SUNSTONE, October 2007, p. 11). “They felt the calendar is inappropriate and not the image that the Church wants to have,” Hardy told the

Associated Press. Hardy says several of his models have been asked by their bishops about the calendar, but none have faced disciplinary action. Hardy was disciplined just as the 2009 *Mormons Exposed* calendar went to press. A 28 July *Newsweek* feature on the excommunication claims that Hardy plans another project: *Mormon Muffins*—“a calendar of Moromon Moms and their favorite recipes.”

Missing. The remains of LDS pioneer PARLEY P. PRATT, from its burial site in Rudy, Arkansas. Planning to re-inter the 19th-century apostle in Salt Lake City, workers spent four days searching unsuccessfully for Pratt’s grave. The failure is blamed on the age of the site, the shallow depth of the grave, and the moisture in the clay soil.

Ruled out. As Joseph Smith descendants, MOSIAH HANCOCK and OLIVER BUELL, two purported descendants of the Prophet through his plural wives. Ugo Perego, of the Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation, has now used DNA testing to rule out a total of five alleged descendants. The other three eliminees are MORONI LLEWELLYN PRATT, SEBULO JACOBS, and ORRISON SMITH.



Convicted. LDS businessman VAL E. SOUTHWICK, after swindling more than 800 investors, many of them fellow Mormons. Southwick emphasized his Mormon affiliation and used his connections in the LDS Church as his Ponzi schemes cheated investors out of as much

as \$180 million.

Elected. Grand Master Mason, BYU law graduate GLEN COOK, believed to be the first Mormon in nearly a century to receive that title. Angered by the similarities between Masonic rituals and Joseph Smith’s endowment ceremony, Utah Freemasons long banned Latter-day Saints from joining the fraternity. The ban was rescinded in 1984.



Published. *Stolen Innocence*, a book by ELISSA WALL that chronicles her marriage at age 14 in a ceremony performed by FLDS Church leader Warren Jeffs. Last year, Wall’s testimony helped secure Jeffs’ conviction on two counts of being an accomplice to rape (see SUNSTONE, October 2007, p. 76).

Poised. For a comeback, JIMMY FLINDERS, fictional lead of *Saturday’s Warrior*, 35 years after the LDS-themed musical premiered. A sequel, titled *The White Star*, has been written by Doug Stewart and Lex de Azevedo, the writing and composing team responsible for the original.