

Vol. 4, No. 2

1998
April 1997

Conference Critique: Come Prepared!

The first Conference Critique in its experimental new format will be held Wednesday, April 8, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. in the third floor auditorium of the Salt Lake City Library, 209 East 500 South, in downtown Salt Lake City.

According to Janice Allred, this semi-annual conference critique, for the first time in four years, will differ from the traditional format of presentations by four or five panelists reflecting on the just-past semi-annual general conference, interspersed with audience reactions.

"Now, everyone who attends is a participant," she said. "The Mormon Alliance considers general conference to be the Church's most important collective tradition. Even people who think they don't like general conference or are bored by it or can't stand to watch it discover that it feels very different when you're watching to make sense out of it. You notice different things than when you're just sitting through it. You get engaged on a different level. You pay attention to what works and doesn't work. Most panelists in the past have found conference watching to be not only interesting but even enjoyable and healing."

Due to scheduling problems at the library, the original plan to meet in the room where the chairs could be arranged informally had to be postponed until the October conference critique, "but we'll

work with the limitations of fixed seating this time and enjoy the difference in October," she commented.

Conference Watchers' Guide

As part of watching conference inter-actively, consider these questions:

1. Did this conference seem to have a theme with several speakers addressing the same topic? (Growth and retention have been two of President Hinckley's emphases at regional and area conferences.)
2. Were any "problems" singled out for particular mention?
3. How inclusive were the addresses? Does the audience continue to be traditional two-parent families with young children in the home? What about the divorced, the never-married men and women, the inactive, and those three typically rebuffed audiences: feminists, gays, and intellectuals?
4. What were the messages to women, particularly at the Young Women's meeting? What were the messages to men at the priesthood session?
5. Were any social issues addressed?
6. Were there any theological innovations or new interpretations?
7. What about structural changes, new officers, releases, and other changes?
8. What are your general conference fantasies?



Uncommon Dissent

Gene Mahalko

ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

The Mormon Alliance was incorporated on July 4, 1992. Its purposes are to identify and document ecclesiastical/spiritual abuse, to promote healing and closure for its survivors, to build more sensitive leadership, to empower LDS members to participate with more authenticity in Mormonism, and to foster a healthier religious community.

By Common Consent is the quarterly newsletter of the Mormon Alliance. Comments, articles, and items for inclusion are welcome, if they are submitted thirty days before the mailing deadlines, which are the first weeks of January, April, July, and October. Please send them to Mormon Alliance, 6337 S. Highland Drive, Mailbox 215, Salt Lake City, UT 84121.

Subscriptions are \$30 for each calendar year. At any point during the year that a subscription begins, you will receive the four newsletters of that year and the *Case Reports* volume for that year. On request, you may receive meeting notices at no charge. Copies of earlier Case Reports, 1995 and 1996, are available from Signature Books for \$20 apiece (price includes shipping) at 564 W. 400 North, Salt Lake City, UT 84116. The order line is (801) 531-0164.

To report cases of ecclesiastical and spiritual abuse, contact Lavina Fielding Anderson, 1519 Roberta Street, Salt Lake City, UT 84115 (801) 467-1617. Please report changes of address here as well.

Late Again

The now-traditional announcement that the annual volume of the Case Reports is late is a yawner for those originally told to expect Volume 3, 1997 in November of 1997. "What can I say?" says Lavina Fielding Anderson, bottleneck and apoloque. "The problem certainly isn't lack of high-quality material or lack of interest in previous volumes."

Expect the 1997 volume in early May with its accounts of missionaries who had considerably less than the best two years of their lives, the experiences of gays and lesbians who tried to talk to their ecclesiastical leaders, and the documentary history of David Wright, excommunicated in 1993 for his essays applying biblical criticism tools to the Book of Mormon.

The 1998 volume, due out in the fall, will deal with the 1993-95 excommunications and firings from BYU.

As usual, the annual winter convening of the Utah State Legislature is one of the most popular spectator sports in the state. This year's session was remarkably restrained compared to past years' exhibitions of peculiar morality legislation. What was lacking in quantity, however, was made up for in quality.

The minimum marriage age in Utah is fourteen, the youngest in the entire United States. A state representative planned to propose raising it to sixteen but had second thoughts when he found out that, in addition to parental consent, a judge has to approve the marriage. He had third thoughts when informed that all a judge could do was ask if the marriage were coerced and when he saw the general public outrage that fourteen-year-olds were being allowed to marry. He reintroduced the bill to raise the marriage age.

The Salt Lake County Clerk enthusiastically supported the bill because she was the one who had to perform or license some marriages that she found very questionable. Couples from out of state were coming, if not in droves, certainly in the dozens per year, so middle-aged men could marry middle-school-aged girls.

The bill had one dissenting vote in committee and passed the house by about an 80 percent margin. There was some surprise among radio talk show hosts that it was not passed unanimously. But sanity seemed to be clearly in control.

Then the state senate balked. The bill failed narrowly, was brought up for a vote again in the closing minutes of the legislative session, and failed by one vote. The only sense I could make out of comments from the "nay" voters was that a raised age would somehow take away a basic freedom and that, since fourteen-year-olds could get or cause a pregnancy, they should be allowed to marry. (No one actually quoted the LDS Church's basic position that the option of choice for pregnant teens is to marry followed, in this order, by not marrying and placing the infant for adoption, and by not marrying and keeping the baby, but did I hear ever-so-faint echoes?)

By this logic, since fourteen-year-olds clearly can have both the capacity and willingness to get drunk, we ought to lower the drinking age to

fourteen. As it stands right now, the underage bride or groom cannot legally toast his or her union in champagne at his or her own wedding reception.

Marriage is the most important, far-reaching decision a person will make in his or her life, yet the state requires less experience and maturity for marriage than it does for getting a credit card, a beer, or a driver's license. A minor who wants to get tattooed must have a parent physically present--not a requirement for a marriage.

Thanks to our vigilant legislature, you may receive wedding invitations engraved: "The couple is registered at Toys R Us."

The Modern Practice of Mormon Kitschcraft

Troy Williams

Is anybody else bugged by Mormon kitschcraft? You know, the shameless production of cheap, sentimental, LDS memorabilia like porcelain temples, Nephite lunch pails, and Johnny Lingo action figures? I think part of the sealed portion of the Book of Mormon reads:

"God commandeth that there shall be no kitschcrafts; for, behold kitschcrafts are that men market the gospel that they might get gain, but they seek not the welfare of Zion."

Of course there is no doubt that manufacturers honestly convince themselves they seek the welfare" of Israel. Obviously, one can build the kingdom and still make a quick buck at the same time!

And to prove it, let's look at the Lord's personally owned and operated Deseret Bookstore. Here we find Mormon kitschcraft at its zenith. Besides cheesy books and music, you can also purchase framed and mounted Proclamations on the Family (embellished with hand-painted flowers), Book of Mormon action figures and board games, CTR rings and car hood ornaments, Return with Honor (RTW) T-shirts, temple ties and Christmas ornaments, and (my favorite) Gordon B. Hinckley fridge magnets.

The demand for quality wares in LDS pop-culture is increasing so rapidly that even an authorized proclamation from the First Presidency couldn't stop it! Well, okay, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em! Here are some ideas that I think would

bless the LDS community enormously and turn a handsome profit as well!

1. Temple-Chase: The Board Game. Be the first to make your calling and election sure! by Packer Brothers. Also on CD-ROM.

2. Electric Seer Stones. Also from Packer Brothers. Look into the stone and find your eternal companion! Batteries not included.

3. Life-size President Hinckley cardboard cut-outs.

4. FTB rings. To encourage our youth to always "Follow the Brethren."

5. CTR, RWH, and FTB insignia nose and navel rings. Because kids will be piercing anyway

...
6. Electronic Mortal-Pets: Experience life as God! Create an electronic spirit-child and raise it in the palm of your hand. Punish it for sinning! Bless it for obedience! Give it revelations! Cause natural disasters randomly!

And then think of the commercial appeal of expanding a new line of Mormon action figures. No youth in Zion would be complete without the following:

1. Joseph Smith: "Treasure Seer" action figure: complete with seer stone, shovel, divining rod, and hat.

2. Joseph Smith: "Nauvoo Legion" action figure: In royal regalia with sword-cutting action arm and white horse.

3. Joseph Smith: "Polygamist" action figure: complete with drop-away trousers. Additional wives sold separately.

4. Joseph Smith: "Master Mason" action figure: complete with apron, Masonic robes, compass and square.

5. Emma Smith: "Elect Lady," polygamy's foe action figure.

6. Porter Rockwell: with two-gun-slinging action.

And for those of you who like your action figures to be a little more contemporary:

1. Spanish Fork Barbie: with gravity-defying hair.

2. Jerald and Sandra Tanner: "Career Apostates" action figures complete with mix-and-match anti-Mormon tracts.

3. Last Days Survivalist: with army fatigues, ammunition, and copy of *An Enemy Hath Done This*. Food supply and survival bunker play-set sold separately.

There is also a need to make Church history



more accessible to our youngsters. I'm presently negotiating with Breathing Scriptures about producing animated adaptations of the popular books, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, and *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*.

Just consider the great spiritual boon the above products would bring to the Saints. The potential here is endless! As long as the LDS demand is high, I feel prompted to supply! May we all seek the welfare of Zion and bring economic blessings upon our heads continually.

Being a Class Heretic: Ten Tips for Success

Lew Wallace

Every Sunday School class worth its salt needs a class heretic (CH) who will keep the teacher on his or her toes, import relevant knowledge from strange fields, play devil's advocate when needed, inject variety when the tedium of the recycled lesson manual becomes overwhelming, and occasionally prick the consciences of the members by posing questions having to do with the actual consequences of living the gospel as opposed to the pharisaical fancy-footwork of keeping the rules.

As someone who called myself to this position as a teenager and who has seen no signs in the many decades since then that such a calling is neither desirable nor necessary, I offer the distilled wisdom of how to make this calling a successful one. I use masculine pronouns for convenience only, since some of the most successful CHs I have met have been feminine.

1. Be prepared! Know the lesson well. Know what the anonymous lesson authors purposely left out (or didn't know about) and be armed with chapter and verse of your source--preferable scripture or top Church authority from memory. (My personal preferences are Joseph Smith and the D&C, since they are rarely toppable.)

2. Be friend and ally to the teacher. You can say things as a "student" that he, as "teacher" might like to say, but can't. Help amplify and reinforce the good points of the lesson. Help him conclude the lesson as he planned--you can guess it from the direction--perhaps by keeping quiet the last ten minutes or by limiting your input

to very brief, pungent, supportive points. Be a dependable source of discussion-provoking comments whenever he needs you to pep up a class.

3. Use humor where possible. Humor and informal banter relax the class and make it more receptive to new or unusual views or ideas. Come prepared with a few good one-liners. Self-deprecating humor is good. You can introduce some very touchy ideas if you are laughing at yourself.

4. When you take on dumb ideas, choose your battles carefully and try not to offend class members. Instead of issuing direct challenges, use Socratic teaching by asking: "How do you reconcile that with . . . ?" "Should we . . . ?" "Does that mean we believe . . . ?" "What if . . . ?" Asking others for their opinion is much better received than overt assertions. This technique is particularly good for combatting ignorance, error, slothfulness, prejudice, and malice--especially when their proponents employ them "for a righteous purpose."

5. Always make it a policy to turn over every idea or concept to look at unforeseen and/or unintended consequences. "What about . . . ?" "Doesn't this sometimes produce . . . ?" Bring out the beef jerky when the soft stuff has gone down. Hammer home the 88th and 121st sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.

6. Cultivate allies in the class by praising, amplifying, and (if possible) clinching with good scriptural references the good points that another class member has made, especially if he is somewhat antagonistic toward you. Bring books or photocopies which may augment the lesson, but show them to the teacher before class. Let him read your great quotation or pass around your handouts.

7. Be faithful and enthusiastic about aspects of Church work that you find worthwhile--genealogy, music, Scouting, etc. After all, the basic principles of the gospel will produce a healthier, happier, and more productive life for anyone and are worth working for.

8. Stay with the practical. Dodge or ignore (or make mild fun of) the "mysteries" like the number of angels that can dance on the head of a pin. Opinions and speculation will not change reality, but they easily distract us from thinking clearly and realistically about what it actually means to live the gospel. Joke about "we mystery-loving Mormons" if you can get away with it.

9. Know world history, Hebrew history, early Christian history and other religious beliefs. Introduce them in comparisons and contrasts with Mormonism, but always with respect. All people are God's children and worthy of our respect and forgiveness.

10. Really love and appreciate ward members and the emotional support such a network gives--or at least have tolerance for the more eccentric cranks. As the cowboy put it, "You don't know what kind of a burr the other guy has under his saddle." And after all, you're probably the burr under someone else's.

January Meeting . . .

Listening to the Voices of Abuse

Marilyn Jones's earliest memory of physical abuse dates from the time she was an infant, and her father threw her against the wall because she wouldn't stop crying. Although she survived physically, that baby "went to sleep" and did not wake up for years.

Other personalities came forward to deal with the on-going traumas of her childhood as physical abuse continued, complicated by sexual, ritual, and satanic abuse. "I thought everyone heard voices in their heads talking to each other all the time," she says. "I thought that was normal."

In a presentation sponsored by the Mormon Alliance on her personal experience with physical and sexual abuse in January, she read from poetry and displayed artwork created both by and to represent these personalities during six years of intensive therapy. Included were the sleeping baby, the child with lips sewed shut who held the family secret in a black box on her lap, "Mean Margene" who was tough and protective of the others, "David," who asserted the privileges of being male over the others but who also "took the pain" when it grew too intense, "Rabbit," who was a never-failing reminder of the light of Christ, Earthmother, who comforted and was wise, and others.

Marilyn, mother of five and grandmother of twelve, has a nursing degree from BYU and a psychology degree from Utah State University, spent ten years as a psychiatric nurse, and is now a counseling psychologist in Mendon, Utah. She began recovering memories at age fifty--"very late," she explains, "since most survivors begin recovering memories in their late twenties or thirties."

She described the returning memories as something like giving birth: the experience is physically agonizing, wrenching, all-absorbing, and cannot be

rushed. She told of lying curled on her bed for hours, suffering searing abdominal pain while in her mind flickered the image of a T-shaped light. When the memory came it was of being raped on the floor of the family garage; the "T" was the gap between the not-quite-closed double doors.

Her childhood also flickered between "daytime" and "nighttime" family and church. The daytime family was united, religiously orthodox and very active; her father served two missions, was a bishop, and went regularly to the temple. The "nighttime" family consisted of beatings and torture for her and her three younger brothers. The physical abuse stopped in her late teens; the incest continued until she was married with children.

Marilyn, also a survivor of ritual and Satanic abuse, will discuss the dynamics of those experiences at a Mormon Alliance-sponsored session of Sunstone in August 1998 in Salt Lake City. She is particularly concerned about the plight of abuse survivors in the wake of successful "false memory" suits; frequently, their insurance will not pay for therapy, and often therapists, fearful of lawsuits, will not treat abuse survivors.

#####

Afternoon at Autumn Solstice E. Ann Warner

I am lying on my mother's breast. I feel
Underneath the prickle of grass I feel her breath.
Over together we turn in the sun. I heal
To the slow beat of her heart. She's giving me
birth.

In the tang of scrub oak I smell her. Through the
trees
I hear her hum. She keens. We sing, we sing.
The crickets jingle the cool afternoon. I see
Between blades of grass I see her glance slow-
ing

The skim of wind on my skin. She rounds her
hand
On my head in the sun. We rest between mo-
ments. My bones
Are soft. I touch her skeleton stone in sand.
I stretch but she holds me. She cradles me close
and tones:

*If you lose your balance, fall with me in mind,
And I'll skirl you in my red and autumn wind.*



Churchwatch

Lavina Fielding Anderson, comp.

January 1998. The American Historical Association named D. Michael Quinn's Same-Sex Dynamics Among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997) as winner of its prestigious Herbert Feis Award. It was the first time the award has been given to a book about gay and lesbian history.

9 January 1998. The day after the ACLU threatened to sue BYU for "religious, gender and age discrimination," BYU dropped its proposed plan to require that only BYU students occupy student-approved housing--but in response to "community feedback," said a spokesperson, not because of the ACLU's threat.

13 January 1998. Despite a rally, public pleas, and private lobbying, the Salt Lake City Council repealed a month-old ordinance forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation by a 4-3 vote. The *Salt Lake Tribune* editorially criticized the repeal as "a sorry moment for Salt Lake City" and urged Mayor Deedee Corradini to veto the ordinance. She refused but said she would "personally intervene" if employees complained to her individually.

18 March 1998. A 6½x10" advertisement in the BYU Daily Universe warned students that neither a temple recommend nor a temple marriage "replaces an . . . Ecclesiastical Endorsement: You can't register without it." (p. 4)

18 March 1998. Travis Robert Tuttle and Andrew Lee Propst, serving in the Russia Samara Mission were abducted and are being held for \$300,000 ransom. Church spokesman Don LeFevre announced that the Church "has taken steps [unspecified] to 'ensure the safety of all other missionaries in the Russia Samara Mission.'" Five missionaries have been killed and two wounded since 1989; this is the first kidnapping. The Church has never publicized its no-ransom policy on kidnappings and hostages. Though explained to General Authorities and mission presidents, most missionaries and their parents remain unaware of it.

19 March 1998. Keith Wilson, a professor in BYU's ancient scripture department, surveyed BYU's 1500 full-time professors and instructors using a "spirituality and education" questionnaire also administered at Baptist-affiliated Baylor University, Notre Dame, and Jesuit Boston College. Wilson stated, "We ought to know how loyal and unified our faculty are."

**MORMON ALLIANCE
6337 HIGHLAND DRIVE
MAILBOX 215
SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84121**