



BY COMMON CONSENT



VOLUME 7, NO. 3

July 2001

AN AFTERTHOUGHT?

In November 2000, Margaret Toscano's stake president summoned her to a disciplinary council. The Toscano family moved into this stake after her husband Paul was excommunicated in a neighboring stake by Kerry Heinz. No member of the Toscano family has attended church in this stake. Operating with a tightly scripted plan, the stake president "proved" that she had continued to speak and publish on feminist topics even after being warned by Heinz. (He appeared to testify against Margaret at the trial.) To no one's surprise, Margaret was excommunicated for "apostasy."

In a session sponsored by the Mormon Alliance during the Sunstone Symposium (August 8-11 in Salt Lake City), Margaret, who holds a Ph.D. in classics from the University of Utah, will describe what happened during the disciplinary council and analyze the inevitable questions: "Why? Why now? And why in this way?"

Audience participation and questions are invited in this session, entitled, "Tidying Up Loose Ends? The November 2000 Excommunication of Margaret Toscano."

April Conference Critique

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

"Ever since I've been moderating these discussions," observed Janice Allred, "I've tried to group the talks according to their emphasis on doctrine, the institution, or Christian living. Institutional emphases always draw more than half. Doctrine and Christian living are always about equal." Even though some of the talks overlapped categories, she identified the 25 talks given at conference

(minus priesthood/YW meetings) as institutional 14, Christian living 6, and doctrinal 5.

The discussion ranged beyond conference to address the closing down of websites sponsored by local Church units ("the point seems to be that there's a unified presentation of doctrine; but if members also feel that they should close down their personally sponsored Mormon webpages, then it leaves the field open for anti-Mormons to move into the void") and the attempt to expunge "Mormon" as a synonym for the Church. Two participants reported that the letter read in sacrament meeting left members confused and bewildered. "I don't know what I am any more," lamented one woman, trying to make sense of the new rules: "I'm a Mormon is okay and so is Book of Mormon and Mormon Tabernacle Choir" but "Mormon and LDS Church aren't?"

One observer pointed out that the Salt Lake City white pages of the telephone directory lists three denominations called "Church of Jesus Christ." Although the reasons for the change were not explained, some felt that this emphasis was an attempt to "make the Church more acceptable to mainstream Christianity" but felt that it was an attempt that would receive only limited success. For one thing, commented one participant, it can be seen as an attempt to "appropriate" Christianity by insisting on being "The Church." For another, the attempt itself may be futile. "Is there really anything we can say or do that's going to convince the Southern Baptists that we're Christian? Not the way they mean it, so why don't we just get on with our business?"

On-going debate on larger questions about conference are: "To what extent are these talks manifestations of concern about control?" and "How do they show the divergences between public discourse ("we're Christians, just like you") and private discourse ("members of the Church are special because we have faith, we understand sacrifice, we have prophets, priesthood, and temples, etc."). "Why present the Church as the epitome of Christianity in external discourse while internally we focus on temples, which are our most exclusionary element?"

Candidate for "Best Talk" included:

- Sydney Smith Reynolds's address on miracles, centered on the survival and progress toward health of her twin grandchildren. In addition to "speaking without simpering," she also showed herself sensitive toward those for whom equally desired miracles did not happen. "She didn't claim that this miracle happened in her family because they were worthier."

- Bruce D. Porter's touching address about learning from the Spirit the importance of teaching a Primary class.

- Marlin Jensen's polished and substantive talk on humility. "He defined his terms, he told an effective story about his father apologizing to him for overreacting that serves as a model for an authority figure who makes a mistake, and he did not equate humility with subservience."

- John K. Carmack's talk on unity was carefully constructed to eliminate some of the usual pitfalls. For instance, he quoted the phrase from "If You Should Hie to Kolob" about "never forc[ing] the human mind," adding, "To the extent we operate in other ways we diminish our right to be called disciples of Christ." However, while claiming that "wealth, social status, and skin color" make no division in unity, he conspicuously omitted "gender."

- Elder Packer's talk ("guilt is a gift") appeared on no one's list of favorites: He didn't distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate guilt; the presumption was that if you felt guilty, you'd done something wrong, but plenty of people feel guilty about things over which they have no control—like divorce or depression. He made it clear that repentance is mediated through the Church, not through Jesus Christ.

- Carol Thomas of the Young Women's general presidency spoke both in the Young Women's meeting and in general conference. Although the

focus on seeking the Spirit in the Young women's meeting was "really refreshing," Sister Thomas's general session talk on "sacrifice as an investment" struck a sour note with some, as did her assumption of affluence in recommending that parents teach teenagers to go through their closets and give clothes that are still in fashion to Deseret Industries so that the poor can also be stylishly dressed.

Other observations included:

- "It's very interesting that even though most missionaries are forbidden to use e-mail, it's being held out as an inducement to get couples to agree to go, since they can stay in daily touch with their children and grandchildren."

- Unusual attention to President Hinckley. "He's not just referred to by speakers bearing their testimonies, but most of them found a way to quote him; and when the television showed the quotation, it also showed a photograph of him so that his image came up repeatedly."

- Temples were mentioned by ten of twenty-three speakers. "Are temples now what make us special?" wondered one. "If temple covenants become the expected norm, then doesn't that diminish the baptismal covenant? Doesn't it become just another marker that differentiates the first-class from the second-class Mormon?" Another countered that the distinction already existed before the temples became widely available "but it was utterly unfair because the temple was out of the reach for so many. The higher expectation of temple activity accompanying the spread of temples" was thus seen as a step toward equality.

- M. Russell Ballard's example of the sixteen-year-old who removed her second pair of earrings after President Hinckley's October 2000 talk "at least acknowledged that earrings are a trivial topic."

- Enthusiasm was high for the Perpetual Educational Fund for three reasons: "It's a real step toward doing something about the economic inequality within the Church. "The technical-based approach shows that information which academics like Garth Mangum and Warner Woodward have been beating the drums about for fifteen years is finally reaching the decision-making levels. It holds the promise of being a permanent solution, not a stop-gap one, not only for economic equality but also to staunch the tremendous inactivity rates returned missionaries in Third World countries."

Even while acknowledging these positives,

observers also speculated on possible down-sides: It gives real money (hence real power) to CES directors; will conflicts of interest develop? Women, because they are underrepresented as missionaries, will be underrepresented as aid recipients. Furthermore, despite President Hinckley's careful parallel with the historical Perpetual Emigration Fund, he neglected to mention that the repayment rate was "abysmal."

- One participant who attended a Sunday session in the Conference Center for the first time, talked about the "community building" effect of that experience. "The camera didn't show the audience or capture the feeling when 21,000 stood up and waited in complete silence for the prophet to enter. The feeling of reverence and expectation was very strong. It was a very moving experience."

LETTER FROM AN OVERDOER

Shirley Walmar

I am writing to thank you for all the helpful information I have received over the years. I can no longer receive mailings because I'm going to South America, where I will be teaching English to the people there, including indigenous groups in rural areas as part of their training to work in the growing eco-tourism trade. This will help them earn livelihoods as well as help save crucial environment and wildlife as the tourist dollars replace profits from logging and poaching. I hope to contribute to the betterment of the world in this way.

Also, I've pretty much forsaken Mormonism. I haven't been to church since my daughter's temple marriage in 1993. I feel very liberated and grateful to be free of an oppressive involvement. My roots and convictions were so deep and strong that I am amazed I was able to extricate myself. My family heritage in the Church goes back to 1832 and 1834, and both sides are also related to Mayflower pilgrims. I feel that I am carrying on this family legacy by being a truth seeker rather than accepting the status quo.

I left Mormonism because I couldn't find satisfactory answers to my questions within the Church, I didn't like the brethren banishing Mother in Heaven, and I felt very uneasy with many contemporary teachings. I continued my research outside of the Church, and I've simply let go of the Church's claims about the "truth."

I haven't figured out how or why God has worked through Mormonism or what lies ahead,

but I do recognize the Lord's hand in all things and realize He/She uses dissidents to further His/Her work. You've had a positive effect on my life! I've left the Church and my old beliefs, my marriage (husband says I'm a wicked apostate), and will soon leave my country for a new adventure. I hope I'm not overdoing it. But on second thought, why NOT overdo it? For thirty years, I've been a passive, people-pleasing, pathetic (husband's favorite word for me), paragon of the priesthood-sanctioned, submissive, subjugated, stepped-on, second-class member of my eternally binding marriage. So now that I'm free, I'm winging it outta here. It's pretty exhilarating! I wonder what I'll turn into.

RATINGS FOR RELIGIONS

Reed S. Roberts

Inspired by the rating system used for movies and videos, I propose the following rating system for religions: 1 = Good, 2 = Fair, 3 = Questionable, and 4 = Bad

Church History

1. Open for discussion; study encouraged.
2. Lessons on history limited. History not a priority subject.
3. An official view exists; only discussions that promote the official view are encouraged.
4. An official view exists; discussion that promotes the official view are required.

Welfare and Social Programs

1. The church has well-established programs to help the poor, elderly, and abused. Programs go beyond the membership.
2. Programs are basically limited to members only.
3. The church has only limited programs and they are limited to members.
4. The welfare and social needs of members are considered the responsibility of themselves and their families; the church is not involved.

Censorship and Secrecy

1. The church has basically no cult-like¹ characteristics.
2. Cult-like characteristics are limited to unconventional doctrines, dress, or views on sex.
3. The church exhibits several cult-like characteristics such as the control of the minds, money,

and time of the members.

4. The church operates as a cult, exhibiting intimidation and censorship.

Leaders

1. They are humble, honest, and compassionate.

2. They are basically friendly but businesslike and management oriented.

3. They are often controlling and frequently impressed with the importance of their positions.

4. They are autocratic and very controlling, have a hard time listening, and are quick to deny² the existence of problems.

Church Classes

1. They are open, friendly, and informative, with a good learning environment.

2. They are somewhat formal and often present "canned" lessons.

3. Only "selected" subjects are taught, and discussion is held to a minimum.

4. They feature carefully scripted lessons with pre-worded questions and "right" answers.

Membership Participation

1. There is broad lay membership participation in most activities and in decision making.

2. There is broad lay membership participation in social activities but only limited participation in religious activities as ceremonies.

3. Lay membership participation is limited both socially and religiously, especially in ceremonies.

4. Lay members play a minor role in all church activities except attendance at meeting.

Treatment of Women and Children

1. Leaders and members alike manifest love and compassion for all members.

2. Leaders tend to favor males. Women and children may be treated well, but have less status.

3. Women and children are treated as inferiors and are often abused.

4. Lay members--males, females, and children alike--are treated as inferiors and are often abused.

Freedom of Speech and Freedom of the Press?

1. The church advocates and practices freedom of speech and freedom of the press for all and defends these activities as rights, even if the specific cause is an unpopular one.

2. The church believes in freedom of speech

and freedom of the press as a general principle but in specific instances justifies censorship.

3. The church accepts the concept but denies the practice.

4. Leaders communicate suspicion about freedom of speech and freedom of the press. They tend to punish both and employ censorship and intimidation.

Attitude toward Needed Changes in Doctrine and Policy

1. Leaders are receptive to needed change, maintain active, on-going evaluation, and often make changes before being pressured to do so.

2. Leaders are conservative about change but will usually implement change if they are concerned about the pressures for change.

3. Leaders rarely implement needed changes unless there is considerable pressure to change over a long period.

4. Leaders make needed changes only under strong, long-term pressure and much negative publicity.

Tolerance toward Members Who Leave the Church for Another

1. Church leaders and members believe in freedom of religion; and while disappointed when a member joins another church, accept the member's decision with understanding.

2. Church leaders and members show concern when a member leaves and encourage him/her to reconsider.

3. Church leaders and members become very upset when a member leaves the flock and will resort to pressure and intimidation to persuade the member to change his/her mind.

4. Church leaders and members condemn the person who is leaving as "apostate" or unrighteous and threaten dire spiritual and social consequences if he/she does leave. In some cases, death threats may be made.

NOTES

1. The dictionary definition of "cult" (Webster's New World College, 1997, p. 337) is: "1a a system of religious worship or ritual, 1b a quasi-religious system of religious worship or ritual. 1c a quasi-religious group, often living in a colony, with a charismatic leader who indoctrinates members with unorthodox or extreme views, practices or beliefs. 2a devoted attachment to, or extravagant admi-

ration for, a person, principle, or lifestyle, esp. when regarded as a fad (cult of nudism). 2b object of such attachment. 3a a group of followers sect." Although this definition seems to imply that religious cults are "small," any religion may exhibit cult-like characteristics regardless of size, age, wealth, or political status.

2. The dictionary definition of "denial" (Webster's New World College, 1997, p. 368) is: "1 the act of denying, saying 'no' to a request, demand, etc. 2a a statement in opposition to another, contradiction, the denial of a rumor. 3 the act of disowning; repudiation of one's family. 4a refusal to believe or accept (a doctrine, etc.) 5 law, the opposing by a defendant or a claim charged against him or her." In an ecclesiastical setting, denial occurs when leaders or members will not acknowledge or discuss problems in doctrine, history, scriptures, teachings, practices, or customs.

Guest Sermon

REST FOR THE SOUL

Harry Robert Fox, Jr.

This sermon was delivered to a Japanese congregation in Tucson, Arizona, 12 July 1998.

Jesus invites all who labor and are heavy laden to come to him and receive rest to their souls (Matt. 11:28-30). Hebrews 3-4 stress the urgency of accepting God's invitation for us to enter into his rest, symbolized by the land of Canaan, or the land of "milk and honey." But even though God had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, they hesitated on the border of Canaan because they were afraid of the "giants" in the land.

Who were these giants? I suggest that they were a projection of the Israelites' fear of "milk and honey" or, in other words, that the Israelites feared the sweetness, softness, warmth, and tender loving care associated with the mother-infant relationship. Jesus encountered exactly this same resistance the night he lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings *and you would not*" (Matt. 23:37; emphasis mine).

How does God expect us to overcome our fear of milk and honey (i.e., his "rest")? According to Hebrews 4:12-13, he does it through his two-

edged-sword-Word which opens us up and lays us bare before God. God first opened himself to us when Jesus Christ died on the cross and the great earthquake that shook Jerusalem rent the veil of the temple, thus permitting all of us to enter into his holy presence. The good news of the gospel is the "new and living way" of relating to him and others. (Heb. 10:19-22). As Peter told his hearers, when we did our worst to God in nailing his Son to the cross, God did his best for us in forgiving all of us (Acts 2).

Paul echoes the same truth: "While we were enemies [of God] we were reconciled to God by the death of his son" (Rom. 5:10). This is "milk and honey" information--the sweet, warm, nonthreatening news that God took upon himself the consequence which we should have borne for our own sins.

Does this sound too good to be true? Yes. But it *is* true. When we accept it as true, we are delivered from our defensiveness, able to open up and gratefully love God. We then find ourselves with the energy to do his will in our lives. We can admit who we really are and not waste our energy in trying to maintain defenses and masks in relating to God and others.

This is the good news that feeds our hungry souls with the sweetest of all sweet food. I believe that the greatest need on earth has always been for more nurture. We need to be fed until we are "filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:14-19). What we all want more than anything else is to love and be loved. Our inability to love is largely due to our not having been sufficiently loved. Yet with God, there is no fear in love because perfect love casts out all fear; we are able to love fearlessly because God first loved us (John 4:18-19). Most of his love is delivered through human channels. To whatever extent our need for love has been met, we can become channels of love to others.

Usually we have ambivalent feelings about the exposure of our real selves. Like the Israelites hesitating to enter Canaan, we fear the giants of our own inadequacy. But in reality, deep down we know that we want to be known and loved for who we really are. Yet unless we encounter someone who provides us with a nonthreatening environment in which to open up, we generally choose to remain closed and defensive. Thank God for the "milk and honey" gospel of Christ that empowers us to overcome our fears, allow ourselves to be known, and enter into the rest of his perfect love.

Rita Bowles

I never was the first to reach that tin,
until one day a hallowed breeze
chose to follow me from Sunday School.
I ran with it, and turning onto King Street

for foot and heart both throbbed
from the impact of it all, as I understood
His Kingdom had already Come --
to Lancashire no less.
Only this time, to feed His hungry masses
He'd provided kidney beans
instead of loaves and fishes.

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ORGANIZATIONAL STATEMENT

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MORMON ALLIANCE
1519 Roberta Street
Salt Lake City, UT 84115