



CORNUCOPIA

SUNSTONE invites short musings: chatty reports, cultural trend sightings, theological meditations. All lovely things of good report, please share them. Send to: <stephen@sunstone magazine.com>

Outside, looking in

THE NON-MORMON MORMON

CHRISTMAS IS NEVER AN PLEASANT TIME FOR academics. Along with the chaos, gifts, and general strain that surround the season, there is end-of-semester everything: papers, exams, grading, and worst of all, excuses. The number of grannies who die just as a final paper is due is nothing short of frightening. Last Christmas was no different.

John, a junior, was in my office explaining his difficulties. His granny had just died, and he would not be able to get the final paper done by the due date. “Will that matter?” he asked in a tone that was only partly hopeful—my reputation has thankfully gone before me. As three of John’s grannies have died in the two semesters he has taken classes from me, I barely looked up.

“John,” I paused, and sighed, “the obituary?” And then I went into my “It’s nothing personal” speech. At this stage, I could see a big grin on my office mate’s face. He knows my speech well, and as John left promising something, Colin started laughing.

“You know, he could be Mormon,” he suggested. “His grandfather could have sixty-nine wives. Every one of those dead grannies could be for real.”

The conversation paused as I gave him the look.

“I do watch *Big Love*,” he added for conviction’s sake.

I sighed, “How old could his grandfather be? Polygamy has been banned since 1890.”

Then another colleague popped his head in the door, “I heard you know about baptism for the dead,” he began. “Well, I just read about it, and it’s insulting, and I don’t see the point. And do they really baptize Holocaust victims? Don’t those Mormons know what they are doing?”

You see, I am what my history department colleagues call the “non-Mormon Mormon.” No, I was never a member of the Church. I have never even spoken to a missionary. But yes, I have read the Book of Mormon and a lot more besides. So over the last few years, I have become the spokesperson and explainer of all things Mormon.

Mostly, my role involves answering doctrinal questions:

“Men become gods?” Sometimes geographical: “Independence, Missouri, really? The birthplace of Harry Truman?” Last year it was presidential—Mitt Romney: “Just how many Mormons have run for President?” And most recently, political—California’s Proposition 8: “Why does the Mormon Church still want to create a theocracy?” I should point out, though, that in my department (being concerned with history, and therefore, the deceased), baptism for the dead is always a hot—and alive—issue.

HOW DID I get into this situation? My original interest in all things Mormon was sparked by two people: an older female cousin and my best friend in the sixth and seventh grades.

My older cousin had a crush on Donny Osmond, and whether I wanted to hear about him or not, I heard about him—and his family, and his religion. But, as my cousin soon moved on to AC/DC, none of that would have mattered much if my family hadn’t been parked in Damascus, Syria, by the United Nations, where I met my best friend in the sixth and seventh grades, Emma. It was a friendship that began on day one of my stay, and I am thrilled to say that despite many changes in both our lives, geographical as well as social and educational, I still count her as a friend.

Emma comes from solid Mormon stock. Her mother and father both graduated from BYU, and her family was a cousin-of-sorts of Ezra Taft Benson. Emma’s family was, however, loudly disillusioned with Mormonism—every aspect of it: the Church, its leaders, rules, history, members, even its recipes (one particularly memorable one involved corn flakes). Yet they were always prepared to answer the questions of a curious sixth-grader—one who was precocious enough to ask them about their anger, their lack of faith, what started it, and why.

I appreciated their answers, as much as a sixth-grader could, and I remained curious (perhaps a portent of my future as a historian. After all, Mormonism is the all-American religion: born here, theologically based here, built here, and likely a permanent resident). I was hooked by their religious beliefs, the meaning they attached to them, and how they interpreted it—their bitterness, frustration, but also continued fascination.

When I was in the seventh grade, we moved again, but my interest in Mormonism was firmly established. I researched and read to the point where I found myself able to answer other people’s questions. I even picked up a copy of the Book of Mormon once. It was full of strange names and weird events and made very little sense. But I did struggle

through it and have reread parts of it since then. Does it matter I don't understand it? Not for me, as I have also read the Koran and the Bible, not always understanding them either.

While I am not a church-going person in any denomination, I do like to borrow from a number of belief systems. These form my spirituality, and yes, they include aspects of LDS theology. For example, I enjoy and often listen to Elder Busche's meditation, available on YouTube, and I draw a great deal of comfort from the notion of the eternal family. (Caveat: I am really hoping that does not include a crazy uncle.)

Eventually I went to college, earned a Ph.D. in American history, and continued to be fascinated by LDS history. I have a decent library on the subject, consisting of books from authors who believe, those who seem ambivalent, and yes, those who have been excommunicated, as well as some who never were Church members to begin with and see the Church as a cult.

I believe LDS history has an important place in American cultural, social, and intellectual history. The opening of the West and its timing with the formation of the LDS Church are deeply interconnected—the West provided the space and freedom in which Mormonism could survive and later thrive.

Last year, I presented a paper at the Mormon History Association conference on Mormon-Methodist relations in nineteenth-century Utah and was delighted with its reception. At present, I am working on writing it up in the hope that the *Journal of Mormon History* will publish it. Kean University, where I work, has given me a six-credit reduction in my teaching load this year to continue my research. I teach two classes where I present LDS history: “A History of

the American West” and “A History of Religion in America.” As usual, baptism for the dead and the Mountain Meadows Massacre were the hot topics in the religion class this semester.

Looking back, I guess I should thank my cousin's infatuation with Donny, plus Emma's family for putting me on the path to my career studying aspects of Mormonism. Though sometimes I wonder what it might have been like to be an AC/DC scholar.

BRID NICHOLSON
Union, New Jersey

In the world

POLITICS AS USUAL?

Not long ago, writings by and about Mormons were irregular occasions in the popular and academic press. But these days, Mormons are everywhere, from the national media to literary journals to handmade 'zines. This column gathers some interesting and overlooked items, Mormon and otherwise.

PROPPING THE PROP

“Competing Social Movements and Local Political Culture: Voting on Ballot Propositions to Ban Same-Sex Marriage in the U.S. States,” by Arnold Fleischmann (University of Georgia) and Laura Moyer (Louisiana State University). *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 90, no. 1, March 2009, 134–149.

THE POPULAR MEDIA TENDS TO FILE POLITICAL leanings into the simple and broad categories of “blue state” and “red state.” If this is so, then how did “blue-state” California pass a “red-state” ballot measure such as Proposition 8? As is usually the case, politics are more complicated than our need to simplify them.

As the fallout from Prop 8 overshadows our recent memory, in the current issue of *Social Science Quarterly* scholars Arnold Fleischmann and Laura Moyer look back on similar ballot measures in 2004 and 2006, weighing the relationship between larger social movements and local politics.

Using “social movement theory,” Fleischmann and Moyer try to understand the variation in local support for same-sex marriage bans in twenty-two states by looking at data on a county-by-county level and among various demographics, including Mormons, Catholics, ethnic identities, age groups, and household types, as well as voting records. The



JEANNETTE ATWOOD

study finds that Mormons largely support same-sex marriage bans (no surprises there) but that there has been an increase in that support from 2004 to 2006.

Mormons are far from being alone in their opposition, however. Those opposing same-sex marriage include female-headed households and people living in areas dominated by mega-churches. But it is African-Americans who are “among the groups that are most hostile to same-sex marriage.” In contrast, counties with a large Catholic population are less in favor of such bans.

Fleischmann and Moyer conclude that “local context matters in statewide campaigns. This is contrary to the overly broad classification of states in partisan or ideological terms.”

If anything, this questions the blue state/red state perception and highlights Democrat Tip O’Neil’s comment that “all politics is local.”

Hopefully Fleischmann and Moyer will continue this study in light of California Prop 8 voting records, adding insight to whether Mormon support of the proposition was equal to the media attention they received on the issue.

POLITICS OR PROPHETS?

“Religious Identification and Legislative Voting: The Mormon Case,” by Damon M. Cann (Utah State University). *Political Research Quarterly*, vol 62, no. 1, March 2009, 110–119.

WHILE THE PREVIOUS study reinforces the idea that Mormons usually vote in one direction, Damon Cann’s recent research considers the possibility that Mormon politicians do the same. “Given that the influence of religion in the mass public is so strong, it is logical to wonder about the effect of religious affiliation on elites,” he writes. Simply put, are Mormon senators and Congressional representatives influenced by their religion as much as rank-and-file Mormon voters are?

The study addresses a fear among U.S. citizens, evident in Mitt Romney’s recent campaign. If a Mormon were president of the United States, would LDS President Thomas S. Monson have a hotline to the White House? As Cann states, “This potentiality has been a point of contention in presidential elections, where religious candidates have, at times, been characterized as having their first loyalties to their religion rather than to the nation.” With recent rumblings that Mitt Romney will once again run for President (with a favorable showing at the Conservative Political Action Conference Straw Poll), the question will probably continue dogging Latter-day Saint politicians.

Cann tackles this question by assessing the voting records of ten Mormon political elites (eight Republican, two Democrat) and proposes a “religious influence hypothesis” to determine whether religious affiliation is a factor in how they voted. He writes, “if these Mormon members of Congress are influenced by their religious identity, we would

expect to see a very high degree of voting cohesion among them.” Using 10,000 random sample sets and the Rice cohesion score (more statistics!), Cann finds some interesting results.

He reports, “While the cohesiveness among LDS representatives is higher for social issues than for economic or foreign policy issues, the same is true of average cohesion among randomly drawn sets of eight Republicans and two Democrats. In short, the evidence does not support the idea that there is a distinctive Mormon voice in the U.S. House of Representatives.”

Considering all his data sets, Cann concludes that the “results find no empirical support for the allegation that Mormon elected officials are beholden to ecclesiastical authorities.”

DALLAS ROBBINS
Salt Lake City, Utah

A place for every truth

CRUISIN’ WITH DAVID O.

This regular Cornucopia column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as compiled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adopted from the statement inscribed on Elder Talmage’s tombstone: “Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man or yet to be made known.”

BEFORE BECOMING FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE Quorum of the Twelve, James E. Talmage and David O. McKay were brought together when McKay attended the University of Utah, where Talmage was president and taught geology classes.

In his journal of 8 April 1906, Talmage writes: “The resignations of Bros. [John W.] Taylor and [Matthias] Cowley, and the death of Apostle Mariner W. Merrill, made three vacancies in that body of Council of the Twelve. These were filled on nomination and vote by the following: Orson F. Whitney, [George E.] Richards (a son of the late Apostle Franklin D. Richards) and David O. McKay (a former student of mine). They are good men, and I verily believe selected by inspiration.”

Talmage joined his former student as a member of the Quorum five years later, when he was ordained on 8 December 1911. He and Elder McKay served on several assignments together during the next twenty-two years until Talmage’s death in 1933.

In 1924, McKay’s health had become “impaired” (Talmage’s word. He did not elaborate on Elder McKay’s health problem). At the time, McKay was serving as president of the European mission. Prior to this assignment, he had toured the LDS Church missions throughout the world with Hugh J. Cannon. It might have been that after

his extensive travel and significant time from home, McKay suffered from fatigue.

The custom was for members of the Twelve to serve as mission presidents in Europe for three years. The assignment was typically given in order of seniority. Joseph Fielding Smith was the next apostle in line to preside in Europe. However, McKay suggested that Talmage, the next in seniority following Elder Smith, be given the assignment instead. His belief (which proved to be correct) was that because Talmage was a native of England, and because of his many scientific associations, Talmage might have positive influence with the newspapers who had been printing scurrilous articles about the Church.

There are numerous apocryphal stories regarding McKay’s penchant for not being acceleratedly challenged when in the driver’s seat. On 11 November 1924 (Armistice Day), McKay took Talmage on a tour of sites related to the First World War, with a stop to inspect a Church building. Talmage writes: “Heavy fog at intervals made motoring somewhat hazardous. Bro. McKay has proved himself a real master at the wheel.”

Joyful noise

WHAT’S IN A BIRTHDAY?

ONE SUNDAY, OUT OF PURE CURIOSITY, I began to wonder whether the birth dates of authors and composers of hymns in the current (1985) hymnbook formed some type of pattern. So I began the lengthy process of tabulating and organizing the dates of birth of both authors and composers. Seven hundred twenty-three (723) author/composers are associated with hymns, but for the purposes of this article, I excluded fifty-six hymns because they are identified as traditional carols, folk songs, anonymous, or adapted without authorship from a psalm, booklet, or other older songbook and thus did not list any birth dates.

As Table 1 reveals, the largest number of authors and composers (366) had birth dates in the 1800s, with the 1900s listing the second largest number (242). The range of birth dates was from 700 A.D. to the mid-1900s. The largest number of authors and composers was associated with hymns between pages 201 and 300, which means that the lower numbered hymns tended to include more of the folk songs and lyrics and unattributed music. Being included in the earlier part of the hymn book may mean that the folk songs are more familiar to choristers and congregations and therefore easier to sing.

The reason for the inclusion of so many works by composers and lyricists born between 1800 and 1985 is simple—the source materials. Two books of music were available to LDS Church members at the beginning of the 1900s, *The Latter-day Saints’ Psalmody* (1912) and *The Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1905). Karen Lynn Davidson (*Our Latter-day Hymns*, 1988

Table 1
Birth Dates of Authors & Composers
Identified in the 1985 LDS Hymn Book.
Listed by Century and Page Numbers

Century	Page Numbers				Total
	1–100	101–200	201–300	301–341	
700–799	1				1
800–899					0
900–999					0
1000–1099			1		1
1100–1199					0
1200–1299	1				1
1300–1399					0
1400–1499	1	1			2
1500–1599	3	4	3		10
1600–1699	9	15	6	1	31
1700–1799	2	32	29	6	69
1800–1899	31	135	157	43	366
1900–1999	131	44	52	15	242
Total	179	231	248	65	723

and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1992) writes, “in 1886 President John Taylor called together a committee to provide a musical supplement to the *Manchester Hymnal*” [a collection of sacred hymns of the Church printed in England that served as the principal hymnbook of the English-speaking Saints for many decades]. The result was the *Latter-day Saint Psalmody*, which was published in Salt Lake City in 1889 and went through six more editions. The *Psalmody* emphasized home composition, that is, new music that was written by such LDS composers as George Careless and Ebenezer Beesley to accompany the old texts in the *Manchester Hymnal*.” Indeed, the preface of the 1889 version of *The Latter-day Saint Psalmody* states, “The original music, with some few exceptions, is the production of ‘our mountain home’ composers.”

Between 1948 and 1950, a standardized hymnbook was prepared, retaining official status until 1985 when it was revised. Davidson notes that “seventy hymns that were part of the 1950 hymnal were dropped in 1985, and ninety-two new or newly borrowed hymns were added, of which forty-four were LDS contributions wholly or in part.” This may explain why the 1950 hymnal includes authors and composers with more recent birth dates.

New composers and authors may find it more difficult to have their works included in future editions of the hymn book, since, as Davidson explains, the goals of the hymn selection committee were “to include as many of superior artistic merit as possible while keeping in mind the preferences and needs of the general Church membership; a well-loved hymn ran little risk of being dropped, even if it did not meet high literary or musical standards.”

R. WAYNE PACE
St. George, Utah